Using Participatory Assessment to Engage Students in Formative Assessment
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Summary

All assessment is formative when part of a learning system that is process-based rather than product-based. Learning experiences grounded in situative theories of cognition can lead to more effective and efficient formative feedback that is more student than instructor driven.

Problem/Background

Assessment is an integral part of education and is seen as formative or summative. Formative assessment is diagnostic in nature, can be formal or informal, and provides information to the teacher and that allows modification of instruction and engagement in order to promote student learning. Summative assessment is typically defined as an end-point evaluation of whether students have mastered material and/or skills. Some summative assessment may be out of the control of teachers (state standardized assessments, for example). Formative assessment, however, informs what teachers and students do on an almost constant basis in order to maximize student learning.

In "A situative response to the conundrum of formative assessment" (2015), Hickey argues that a situative perspective, or one in which learning is situated in a social and cultural context rather than in individual knowledge or behavior, allows for a broader view of assessment in which instruction, assessment, and testing can serve formative functions. Learning includes social and cultural contexts and can't be understood in isolation from these components. While individual declarative knowledge (e.g., facts or concepts) is easily assessed, communal disciplinary discourse and engagement is more challenging to assess but holds the potential for deeper learning as it is more meaningful to learners, tied more closely to their own and their peers' experiences. Fostering participation in discourse eventually leads to more trustworthy evidence of learning on traditional assessments (i.e., "transfer") since it is less likely that the information and skills were presented in the identical format.

Situative theory underlies Participatory Assessment, a framework that has four major design principles: 1) contexts give meaning to concepts and skills, 2) reflections on engagement are assessed rather than artifacts, 3) assess individual knowledge prudently, and 4) measure achievement unobtrusively. These principles will be summarized in more detail in the following section. The focus of the framework is on guiding the development of individual disciplinary knowledge and skills through social and cultural interaction.

Research Focus

Participatory Assessment is a course design framework that is organized around four design principles that were refined in a variety of courses at graduate, undergraduate, and secondary

levels. This article describes how these design principles were used to design and refine a fully online secondary world history course taught by the first author.

The first principle of Participatory Assessment is *use contexts to give meaning to concepts and skills*. Meaningful knowledge of particular disciplines does not consist exclusively of being able to retrieve specific facts. When students have personally relevant reasons for interacting with knowledge, they engage with it. In the introductory lesson for the world history course, for example, students are asked to rank essential questions based on their own interests. Each student's top-ranked essential question is the lens they will use to study the past. Students know that, by the end of the course, they will be responsible for answering that essential question and applying what they've learned in the course to proposing solutions for a current problem in the world based on the historical background of that problem. In an English course, if students know they will be creating their own children's book, they will have a clear purpose for developing knowledge and skills related to writing. These personalized and problematized activities foster discussion, questioning, editing, etc. with and by other students and the instructor, providing many opportunities for valuable formative feedback.

The second principle of Participatory Assessment is *assess reflections rather than artifacts*. Artifacts are the actual products that students create as they are learning and interacting with other students (engaged in productive disciplinary engagement). When students are engaged and interacting meaningfully, the sheer volume of artifacts can become overwhelming and present an assessment nightmare. When students are asked to reflect on their engagement, i.e., what they did, they must have developed or be developing a certain level of disciplinary knowledge to respond in a way that makes sense. Asking students to reflect on how what they learned will influence their future work (consequential engagement), how their context affected their learning (contextual engagement), and how their peers shapedtheir learning (collaborative engagement) can provide insight into disciplinary engagement. In the world history course mentioned above, students are asked in each lesson to reflect on how their essential questions helped or hindered their understanding of the lesson content, what peers' artifacts and interactions most helped them in their learning, and how they can apply what they have learned to future lessons and non-school situations (such as current events). Students must have agency and ownership in the development of their knowledge in order to produce quality reflection responses. They have to actively think about their own learning, allowing for dynamic development of learning as process as opposed to static outputs. Focus on the process, as opposed to the objects, of learning transforms conceptions of competencies into a growing and emerging set of skills. Reflection over time allows for constant evaluation and re-evaluation of individual development and growth. Students are actively involved in their own formative assessment of their learning.

The third Participatory Assessment principle is *assess individual knowledge prudently*. The use of high quality classroom assessments, such as more traditional tests, of individual learning can provide evidence of whether students have learned content and skills well enough to apply them across contexts. Ideally, these assessments should make up a relatively small portion of the

overall course grade which allows the inclusion of challenging items. Learners generally respond well to the idea that these assessments evaluate knowledge that remained from their creation of and engagement with their own and fellow learners' artifacts. For K-12 educators, these assessments can also ensure that students are getting exposure to the types of items they may see on standardized state assessments and/or school or district end of course assessments. While tests and other types of assessments tend to be seen as summative assessments, they can still hold some formative value for students as learning the correct answers can influence their future use of the knowledge. These assessments hold more value for evaluating the curriculum and offer insights for where and how to make adjustments.

So what?

Look for platforms or tools that allow for organization of and reflection on student portfolios of work in a way that is meaningful for them. This could include student choice in format/platform/tool. Flexibility should be key but may be constrained by what integrates with the learning management system (LMS) used or other school/district platforms/tools. Reflect carefully about what tools can provide the flexibility you want/need. Some include Google Drive, VoiceThread, Padlet, Seesaw, Kidblog, Edublogs, Three Ring, Weebly, etc.

Source

Hickey, D. T. (2015). A Situative Response to the Conundrum of Formative Assessment. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice*, 22:2, 202-223. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0969594X.2015.1015404

Additional Resources

Engle, R. A. & Conant, F. R. (2002). Guiding Principles for Fostering Productive Disciplinary Engagement: Explaining an Emergent Argument in a Community of Learners Classroom. *Cognition and Instruction, 20*(4), 399-483.

Hickey, D. T. & Rehak, A. M. (2013). Wikifolios and Participatory Assessment for Engagement, Understanding, and Achievement in Online Courses. *Journal of Educational Multimedia and Hypermedia, 22*(4), 229-263.

Hickey, D. T. (2015, August 3). A Framework for Interactivity in Competency-Based Courses. EDUCAUSE Review. Retrieved from http://er.educause.edu/articles/2015/8/a-framework-for-interactivity-in-competency-based-courses

Hitchcock, C. R. (2016). *Participatory, Online, and Open - Learning History Collaboratively*. Poster session presented at the Annual Conference of the National Council for the Social Studies, Washington, D.C. https://goo.gl/geZUSJ