Working Smarter, not Harder: Managing Assessment for Busy Faculty while Helping Students Learn

Nancy Quam-Wickham, Ph.D.

Coach, National Institute of Learning Outcomes Assessment

Professor of History, CSU-Long Beach

Assessment 101: What is Assessment?

►Grade

- Evaluation of a single student

- May evaluate performance on a single or multiple assignments

- May not be linked to learning outcomes!

- Evaluation tool may or may not be used

- Evaluation may reflect other factors in student performance

►Assessment

- Evaluation of a group of students

- Evaluates performance using a single artifact or assignment

- Evaluation is <u>clearly aligned with learning outcome</u>!

- Evaluation tool is used, raters are usually normed

- Measures achievement of specific outcome (no "radio interference")

Assessment 101: What Assessment is and is Not

- Assessment is a part of the way to measure *institutional effectiveness* -- How all institutional elements (instruction, seat time, student preparation, student services, administrative services) lead to student learning

- Not an evaluation of a single student
- Not an evaluation of a single faculty member

Assessment 101: The importance of Student Learning Outcomes

- A student learning outcome indicates what a student should know and be able to do upon completion of an assignment, course, program of study, degree

- SLOs are a way to communicate to students what is essential to their learning

Assessment measures whether students have met those SLOs.

Don't overthink this!

Reframing: Why is Assessment beneficial for faculty?

Communication

Assessment activities prioritize communication within and across programs at an institution

Assessment activities are process-oriented, not solely results driven

Assessment provides rich opportunities for faculty engagement outside of their disciplinary "bubbles"

Empowerment

Successful assessment is predicated upon faculty expertise

Faculty identify appropriate student learning outcomes & ways to measure achievement

Assessment is inherently an evidence-based practice -- what we do...

Collegiality

Collegiality as *Shared Responsibility* (culture shift)

Integrated approach to education: We are stronger as a whole, not individually

Assessment allows for individual variations on a *"theme"* (SLOs)

The Process of Assessment: Design Thinking Concepts

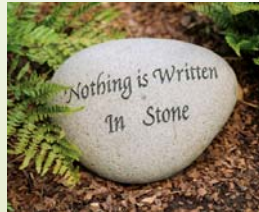(Grant Wiggins & Jay McTighe, *Understanding by Design*)

➢Identify desired result
➢Determine acceptable evidence
➢Design learning activities & instructional strategies
➢Measure: Did our efforts work?

Steps in the Assessment Process

1. Identify Student Learning Outcomes
2. Map your Curriculum
3. Identify Assessment Measures -- Direct or Indirect?
4. **Reporting and Acting on Assessment Results**
   Discuss results collaboratively, later report results, plan future assessments based on current results.

Steps in the Assessment Process: "Closing the Loop"

✓ *Most important step in the assessment process!*
✓ Faculty identify areas for improvement in student learning
✓ <u>Among most effective learning interventions</u>:
   Better, more transparent assignment design
✓ Student learning is influenced by multiple factors outside of the classroom
✓ Instructional units may need to coordinate with student affairs and other divisions

Why Assignments?

- Students take assignments seriously!
- Assignments are linked to grades (students).
- Assignments have relationships to assessment.
- ✓ Embedded assessments use those assignments to measure learning.

Why Assignment Design?

- Assignments bring high-level learning outcomes to life.
- They are among the most powerful signals that faculty send to students.
- Working *together* on assignments helps to develop shared language and more intentionally aligned and scaffolded *sequences* of assignments that can help students integrate and connect their learning.
- The design of assignments matters for student learning.

Relevant Research: Assignments Matter

WPA/NSSE

- Large scale study of writing for learning, 2007-2010

    -Consortium for the Study of Writing in College

- The amount of writing matters but…

- Assignment design matters more

- Especially assignments that pose "meaning-making tasks"

The Transparency Project

- Stage 1: Most promising interventions? Assignments

- Stage 2: Making assignment purpose, tasks, and criteria "transparent" = gains for all…

- And especially for first-generation, low-income, under-represented students
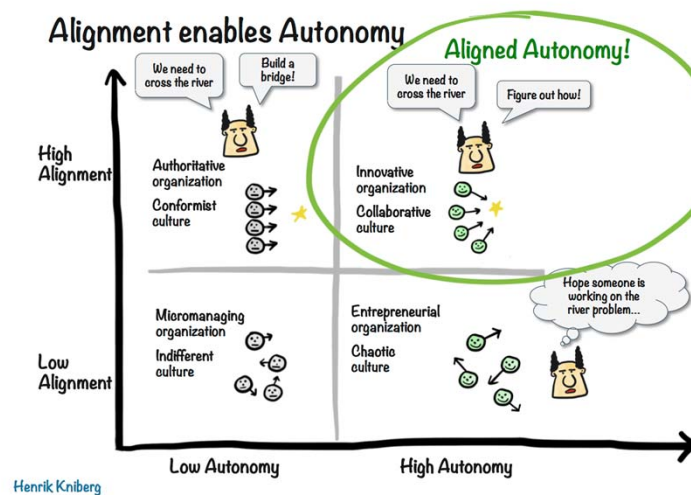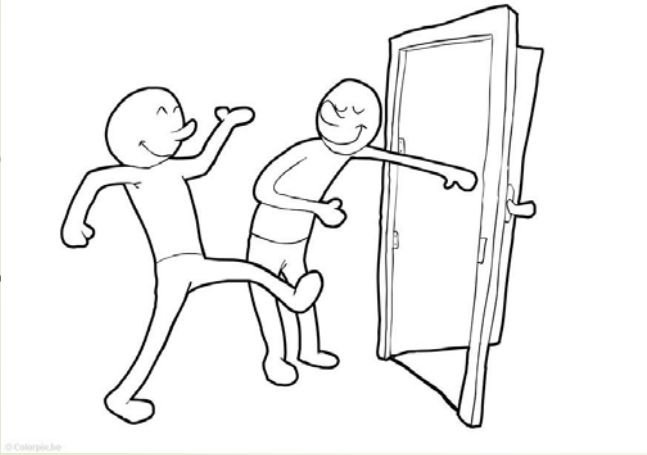
Typical Problems with Assignments

- Are students aware that their assignments are linked to learning outcomes?

- Do our students do understand the purpose of our assignments?

- Can students connect learning from one course & assignment to another?

- Do our students do appreciate the value of general education courses and their assignments ? Do they understand concepts of *skill acquisition*?

Alignment, Scaffolding, Transparency

- How do we create assignments and activities that will elicit student demonstration of a particular learning outcome?

- How do we help students connect skills and learning across assignments, courses, and GE & major programs?

- How do we help students successfully complete assignments, courses and degrees?

Intentional Design ☛ Intentional Learners

"Teachers open the door, you must enter it yourself."
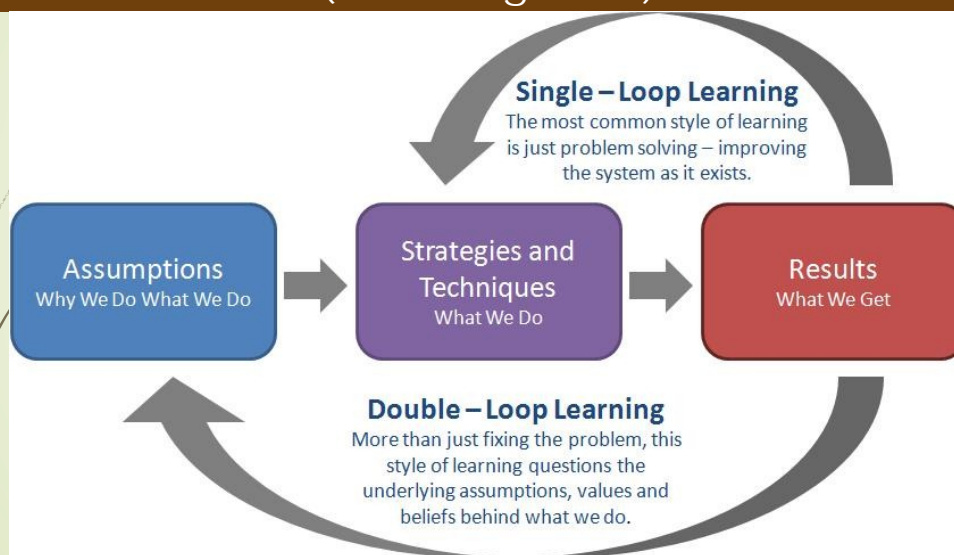
Assignment Design Principles

Faculty work *collaboratively* in a peer-review setting, to create curriculum that *intentionally builds in* opportunities for students to *apply and practice* as well as *transfer* their skills and knowledge, through assignments that students find *engaging and meaningful*.

Features of Effective Assignments

✓ Engaging (Task as Intriguing Problem: John Bean)

✓ Respecting and reflecting different ways of knowing, levels of preparation

✓ Provide useful, formative feedback

✓ **Linked to and aligned with prior and subsequent assignments**

and one more element…

Thinking about Thinking (Metacognition)

Single – Loop Learning
The most common style of learning is just problem solving – improving the system as it exists.

Assumptions
Why We Do What We Do

Strategies and Techniques
What We Do

Results
What We Get

Double – Loop Learning
More than just fixing the problem, this style of learning questions the underlying assumptions, values and beliefs behind what we do.

Questions to Consider

Alignment: To what learning outcomes does this assignment align?

Purpose: What learning outcome(s) does the assignment focus on? Is the relevance to students' majors, lives, careers apparent?

Integrative Learning: In what ways does the assignment support integrative learning?

Task: How might students understand or misunderstand the assignment? Is it clear?

Criteria: What distinguishes a strong student performance from a less strong one?

Steps in the Assessment Process:
"Closing the Loop" -- Designing clearer assignments

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Transparency in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education

Focus on *Purpose, Task, Criteria* -- all students benefit, some benefit more

The Importance of Transparent Assignment Design

The Importance of Transparent Assignment Design

- More transparent assignments address **purpose, task, criteria**
- **Purpose** explains to students how this assignment contributes to their learning
  - Link purpose to module, course, or program learning outcomes!
- **Task** provides clear instructions to students about how to start and complete an assignment successfully
  - This functions like a map on a learning journey
- **Criteria** illustrates to students what a successful assignment looks like
  - Annotate examples. Best practices: Don't provide the "A" assignment!

Steps in the Data Collection Process
Take-away point: Keep it Simple!

Qualtrics is an easy survey tool that can be adapted to allow faculty to enter assessment data quickly; exports to Excel, then use for reports & data visualization

Wrap Up

- Incorporating Purpose, Task, Criteria creates clearer, more transparent assignments
- Well-designed assignments lead to more and better learning -- and better assessment evidence
- More transparency is beneficial for <u>all students</u> and particularly good for:
  - ✓ First-generation students
  - ✓ Lower division courses
  - ✓ High DFW courses
  - ✓ Key or bottleneck courses for majors

Review of Assessment Principles

- Faculty are experts in instruction
- Faculty-driven process provides meaning
- Doing assessment well means prioritizing, planning ahead, using timesaving tools
- We are already assessing, we just need to formalize what we already do
- If we don't do assessment, someone else will do it for us!

Steps in the Assessment Process
Take-away point: Don't reinvent the wheel!

Thank you!