

SWAP SESSION NEWSLETTER

No. 5

3-17-98

Topic~ Assessment and Evaluation of Learning

Ideas were presented by Dr. Vicki Clegg, Educational Advancement, and Mr. Allan Goodman, Architectural Engineering and Construction Science.

Dr. Clegg began with an examination of the terms assessment and evaluation. She stated that it is important to note we are talking about assessment and evaluation of *learning*, not assessment and evaluation of content, courses, or teaching.

Points made about the words *assessment* and *evaluation* include:

* When looking up these words in the dictionary, she found several words that all had the basic definition of forming a judgment of worth or significance. This is what we do when we assess or evaluate learning.

* But, these words all tended to mean something a little different. The words were: assess, evaluate, appraise, rate, estimate, and measure.

* The word *assess* was normally defined as something as broad as the critical appraisal for the purpose of understanding or interpreting. We are trying to get a handle on whatever it is we are assessing so we can better understand and better interpret.

* Another thing that came up over and over was that to assess implied an authoritative judgment, either in the sense we have an authority to make the judgment, or that the judgment was highly reliable.

* The definition of the word *evaluate* suggested an attempt to determine relative or intrinsic worth in terms of something other than money. It also implies a considered judgment in ascertaining value. This is an important issue to keep in mind. Assessment of learning takes a lot of time and goes beyond putting together a multiple choice test.

* The word *rate* was typically defined as determining or estimating a rank or grade. It is an inexact judgment.

* The word *appraise* stresses expert judgment or critical analysis. Dr. Clegg mentioned that this is the word she is the most comfortable using. She said the most important thing we want to know is whether or not our students have learned what we want them to learn. The first decision we have to make is what do we want students to learn and then almost immediately, we have to ask ourselves, "How am I going to know when they have learned it?" or "How am I going to know they understand a concept and can apply it?"

Mr. Goodman talked about the moments when “the lights go on” with our students. How do we know it and evaluate it?

Some clues that tell us “when the lights go on” include:


1. Verbal and emotional responses: “Yes!” “I got it!” “Great idea!”
2. Behaviorists tell us we might be listening for those cues that people say using visual terms (pictures), auditory terms (sounds), or kinesthetic terms (touch).

Different ways students express themselves:

Visual: “That’s clear to me now!”
“Now I see what you mean.”
“I see the light!”

Auditory: “I hear what you are saying.”
“It’s as clear as a bell.”
“That rings true.”

Kinesthetic: “I’m there.”
“Pow I Got it!”



Next, Dr. Clegg and Mr. Goodman asked the audience to think of an example of something they had recently learned and write it down. They then asked the members of the audience to form discussion groups of five and gave them two questions to discuss and answer:

* How do you know you have learned this?

* How do you set up an evaluation or assessment so that you know learning has taken place?

A spokesperson from each group shared one way that they assess or evaluate learning. These ideas include:

1. Asking students to transfer skills or knowledge from one context to another. Example: Perpendicular thinking: Students might learn something in one way and the test question goes at another angle. Students have to transfer or apply knowledge in a new way and demonstrate the knowledge through perpendicular thinking.
2. On true/false or multiple choice questions, students don't just choose an answer but are also asked to provide justification for why they selected that answer.
3. In introductory classes, sometimes the skills coming in are not at the level we want them to be. We want to see if there is a learning process going on. We talked about having a round table discussion where each student talks about a problem that he or she experienced while doing an assignment such as a news article. Other students present how they would solve that problem. This provides a sense that students are learning, and one can build upon these skills they have.
4. A student has learned when he or she can take what he or she has learned and apply it to something new. One knows they have learned it when they say "Yes, but..." and challenge us with another example and ask if it too applies. We also know when the student graduates and applies knowledge to a broader field/ concept in the real world.
5. Students are given a complex problem to solve that doesn't have one correct answer. They are given half the period to solve it, and then are asked to evaluate their own work, make changes, and note what they would do differently as they watch the teacher solve the same problem. Here, students get immediate feedback and reflect on what they have learned. This helps one to see their learning process.
6. One knows they have understood the concept when the students ask the next logical question or a more complicated question that takes the concept to a higher level of complexity.
7. In learning a dance, you can see learning take place as you see the student make a connection between mind and body. The movement they make flows versus being a struggle. Students get out of their own way, and the movement just happens. They allow it to happen.

The two presenters ended the session by asking each person to answer the following question in writing: What did you learn today?



ANNOUNCEMENTS:

1. The next Swap Session will be on Friday, April 10, at 1:30 PM in the Big 12 Room of the Union.

Topic: "Blurring Boundaries between Academics and Student Life Outside the Classroom"

Presenter: Dr. Patrick Terenzini, co-author of the book, How College Affects Students

2. Dr. Terenzini will be delivering the Chester E. Peters Lecture on Thursday, April 9, at 10:30 AM in the K-State Union Forum Hall. Topic: Are we really serious about learning? A follow-up session will take place in Room 212 of the Union at 1:30 PM on Thursday as well.

3. Web page address: <http://www.ksu.edu/biology/scholar>