



Strategies in Teaching Assessment of Student Learning Courses

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Abstract The article is a discussion on the different strategies that a teacher can employ when teaching Assessment of Student Learning courses. A description of the nature of Assessment of learning 1 and Assessment of Learning 2 is provided along with the typical requirements that students need to produce for each course. The different skills and learning competencies involved in teaching the course is complemented by the P21 Framework Definition of the Partnership of 21st Century Skills. Providing appropriate feedback, modeling good assessment practices, encouraging cooperation, field activities, demonstrations, and utilizing technology are highlighted as effective strategies in teaching Assessment of Student Learning courses. Since being a good assessor is one of the keys to becoming a good educator, other teaching competencies are discussed using the National Competency-Based Teacher Standards by the Department of Education as a guide.

Keywords: Student assessment, P21 Framework, teaching assessment

Assessment of student learning has been recognized to play a vital role in the teaching and learning process. Not only do teachers need to know the different strategies and methods in teaching students, but they also have to be well-versed with assessing the students' knowledge, skills, and attitudes in order to make educational decisions. Such task or obligation requires more attention, time, and critical work for teachers; this is the reason why students who are training to become educators go through two undergraduate courses that involve teaching them different assessment strategies – a course called, Assessment of Student Learning.

Assessment of Learning: Course Description

The course, Assessment of Student Learning is divided into two: Assessment of Student Learning 1 (ASESLE1) and Assessment of Student Learning 2 (ASESLE2). Both courses equip future educators with conceptual and technical skills that will enable them to effectively assess student learning. ASESLE1 in particular, focuses on the development and utilization of written assessment tools to improve the teaching-learning process. This also aims to guide students in analyzing test data through reliability and validity measures. On the other hand, ASESLE2 is a course designed to train future educators to properly evaluate educational outcomes using alternative and authentic assessment tools. Moreover, both

ASESLE courses allow students to incorporate concepts, theories, and current researches discussed in class in their development and evaluation of classroom assessment tools and interpretation of assessment data.

Teaching these courses has always been a challenge for teachers. As teachers strive to employ best assessment practices in the classroom, they are also challenged to encourage the students to be more meticulous in planning their own assessment activities – whether they may be the traditional pen and paper tests or alternative forms of assessment. Certain special competencies have to be brought across to the students in order to become good assessors.

Skills and Competencies Involved in Assessment Courses

According to the Framework for 21st Century Learning (2009), a unified, collective vision for learning, students must learn the essential skills for success in today's world, such as critical thinking, problem solving, communication and collaboration. Learning and innovation skills increasingly are being recognized as those that separate students who are prepared for a more and more complex life and work environments in the 21st century, and those who are not. Students taking up assessment courses must think of creative ways to make assessment activities more appealing and effective. They are taught to veer away from traditional approaches to assessment and teach their students to become more engaged in the assessment process. These future educators have to effectively analyze and evaluate the test items that they will construct and match these items to their instructional goals. Making educational decisions based on the results of the assessments they will conduct to their students is also very valuable to the teaching-learning process.

Students learning how to conduct assessment activities are also needed to become information literate. Such information may involve accuracy of the content to be used in a test, the paradigm shifts to assessment practices and its effects, and some ethical issues in assessment.

In addition to this, students must be able to understand and apply technology as they undergo assessment courses. The use of technology is at present, one of the ways to assess student learning. Some examples include online portfolios, online examinations, and online surveys. Even test data analyses are done using programs that can test reliability, validity, and item analysis of a certain measurement. Truly, to be effective in the 21st century, students must be able to exhibit a range of functional and critical thinking skills related to information and technology.

The Partnership for 21st Century Skills also emphasized life and career skills. Today's life and work environments require far more than thinking skills and content knowledge. The ability to navigate the complex life and work environments in the globally competitive information age requires students to pay rigorous attention to developing adequate life and career skills. Students going through assessment of learning courses must be able to incorporate feedback effectively in order to improve their assessment tools. Such flexibility will also help students develop their ability to self-assess as they get to process the different compliments and criticisms given to them. Monitoring their own progress is also an effective assessment practice on its own, for which will guide the students to be more self-directed learners.

Requirements for an Assessment of Learning Course

Classroom assessment is a systematic process of determining educational objectives and gathering, using, and analyzing information about student learning outcomes to make decisions about programs, individual students' progress, or accountability. For students to understand the assessment process, they are tasked to complete certain requirements for their assessment courses. Assessment begins with an analysis of criterion, which includes expectations and demands and other forms of learning targets. This is the reason why in ASESLE1, students are expected to formulate learning objectives for a specific subject task / skill, level, and subject area. This also includes writing objectives for each of the domains - cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains. Since ASESLE1 focuses on test construction and test data analysis, students also need to produce a test development report which includes background, objectives, table of specifications, and an assessment tool based on selected- and constructed-response test items. Moreover, students are expected to analyze and interpret data through item analysis, reliability and validity measures.

ASESLE2 emphasizes authentic and alternative forms of assessment. As such, students are expected to design performance-based assessment tools that are process-oriented and product-oriented. A rubric will be constructed by the students given a particular task or skill in a subject area. In addition to this, they are to construct an assessment tool for the affective domain that is appropriate for a specific group of students. Finally, they need to develop a student portfolio which includes a reflective self-evaluation to assess learning.

Teaching Assessment of Student Learning to Future Educators

Both assessment courses aim for students to reflect on the value of assessment to one's own understanding of teaching and educational processes. In light of this, teaching the course can be truly a challenging task for teachers. *"When our interest is aroused in something, whether it is an academic subject or a hobby, we enjoy working hard at it. We come to feel that we can in some way own it and use it to make sense of the world around us"* (cited in Weimer, 2009). As it may already be obvious, genuine concern and respect for students and student learning is always considered as one of the effective strategies in teaching assessment courses (or any other courses for that matter). As such course can usually scare or intimidate students at the beginning; a teacher must let them feel that the subject can be mastered and that they can quickly succeed in learning them.

Since teachers are guiding students to become future educators, they first need to establish the relevance of the content of what they are teaching. They need to craft explanations that enable students to understand the material. This involves knowing what students understand and then forging connections between what is known and what is new. Particularly, an assessment before instruction has to be done to discover what students already know about assessment and work towards clarifying their knowledge on it. Teachers have to make students aware of the value of assessment in the teaching and learning process and explain the paradigm shifts in the practice of assessment from more traditional approaches to more progressive and modern approaches. Such changes encompass the following: an approach towards alternative assessment, formative assessment as opposed to summative assessment, being more task-based than skill-focused, and an emphasis on performance-based assessments more than pen and pencil tests (Magno & Ouano, 2010).

Teaching assessment also requires for the teachers to mirror appropriate assessment practices in the classroom. This involves using a variety of assessment techniques and allowing students to demonstrate their mastery of the material in different ways. Apart from giving pen and paper tests, it also recognizes the power of feedback to motivate more effort to learn. Since assessment courses require students to work on tasks that involve constructing their own test items, affective scales, and performance assessment plans, the drafts of these are to be checked and rechecked for further revisions. This can be done by either a teacher evaluating the drafts, peer evaluation or even self-evaluation. This will also enable them to be more aware of their own learning progress. Furthermore, critical thinking skills will be more enhanced as they come up with the best output possible.

An application of the theories, concepts, and techniques learned in class is needed as a follow-through for the students. By implementing their assessment plans (e.g. product-oriented or process-oriented performance-based assessment plans) to a group of individuals, students are able to experience how actual teachers conduct assessment activities. Through their experience, they realize which aspect of the assessment process they have to further work on. They also come to a realization of which forms of assessment is more effective depending on the task, level of the students, and subject matter. The students will not only construct their own scales and test items, but also administer them and then analyze the data after. This will enable the students to discover whether or not they have constructed are reliable and valid. This process of allowing the students to experience actual application of different assessment activities is considered more active learning on their part. It is recommended that after the entire process, a self-evaluation and reflection is done, wherein the students can write about their experiences, reflect on how they can further improve themselves in terms of becoming assessors, and how can they utilize their skills and knowledge in their future careers as teachers. Through this, they make what they learn part of themselves.

With the rise of technology, students have become more and more dependent on computers. Such development can be used as an advantage for teachers. Allowing the students some flexibility in the ways they would want to conduct assessments will provide them with more room for creativity. As mentioned earlier, students nowadays opt to make use of online resources as a way of learning. Teachers can guide them in creating online examinations, e-portfolios, and may even administer survey questionnaires online. There are various programs that they may use such as multiply, googledocs, survey monkeys, etc. Data analyses can also be taught using Statistica, Microsoft excel, and SPSS. In becoming a more effective teacher, it has always been a challenge to continuously spark up the interest of the students on the content being taught. Such use of technology has shown to be very appealing to them and is, therefore something that teachers can utilize in teaching assessment.

Transforming current teaching-centered practice to learning-centered practice, using the technologies of today has been evident (Batson, 2010). Structured exercises, fieldworks, challenging discussions, group projects, and self-evaluations are some methods that are used in teaching assessment courses. A move from teaching to learning has been adopted recently as well. Nevertheless, do not discard the lecture or class discussion approach when appropriate, but use it primarily for the purpose of helping students address the essential problems of the course. Lectures and discussions can be used to help students make progress in their projects and, therefore, build their course portfolios.

Monitoring students' progress and giving immediate and appropriate descriptive feedback show how attuned teachers are with the students' learning process. At the end of the

period allotted for the assessment course, group presentations can be done in order for their experiences to be understood and due feedback from both teacher and peers can be given. Challenging as it may be, but students do need to be guided by their teachers as they work on the tasks that they are processing. Encouraging cooperation among peers is also a key for the students to be more engaged with their tasks.

Teaching Competencies Based on NCBTS

“Teaching involves the reflective acquisition and application of complex and problematic technical knowledge to facilitating student learning in actual contexts.” This expresses the theme of the new paradigm of teaching as stated by the National Competency-Based Teacher Standards by the Department of Education in 2006. The teaching strategies presented earlier may aid teachers in teaching assessment of learning courses; however, this is just part of a bigger picture. This is part of our obligation to guide students towards certain competencies they need to develop as future educators.

In the NCBTS, good teaching is being defined in terms of those practices that help students learn better. Primarily, this is concerned with whether teachers are competent in helping students learn. To address this, seven domains were developed. The seven domains are: (1) social regard for learning, (2) learning environment, (3) diversity of learners, (4) curriculum, (5) planning, assessing, and reporting, (6) community linkages, (7) personal growth and development. Domains 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 represent standards referring to “The Teacher as Facilitator of Learning”, whereas domains 1 and 7 represent standards referring to “The Teacher as Learner”.

The domain of Social Regard for Learning focuses on the ideal that teachers serve as positive and powerful role models of the values of the pursuit of learning and of the effort to learn, and that the teacher’s actions, statements, and different types of social interaction with students exemplify this ideal. The domain of Learning Environment focuses on the importance of providing for a social and physical environment within which all students, regardless of their individual differences in learning, can engage the different learning activities and work towards attaining high standards of learning. The domain of Diversity of Learners emphasizes the ideal that teachers can facilitate the learning process in diverse types of learners, by first recognizing and respecting individual differences, then using knowledge about students’ differences to design diverse sets of learning activities to ensure that all students can attain appropriate learning goals. The domain of Curriculum refers to all elements of the teaching-learning process that work in convergence to help students attain high standards of learning and understanding of curricular goals and objectives. These elements include the teacher’s knowledge of subject matter, teaching-learning approaches and activities, instructional materials and learning resources. The domain of Planning, Assessing and Reporting refers to the aligned use of assessment and planning activities to ensure that the teaching-learning activities are maximally appropriate to the students’ current knowledge and learning levels. In particular, the domain focuses on the use of assessment data to plan and revise teaching-learning plans, as well as the integration of formative assessment procedures in the plan and implementation of teaching-learning activities. The domain of Community Linkages focuses on the ideal that school activities are meaningfully linked to the experiences and aspirations of the students in their homes and communities. Thus, the domain focuses on teachers’ efforts directed at strengthening the links between school and community activities, particularly as these links help in the attainment of the curricular

objectives. Finally, the domain of Personal Growth and Professional Development emphasizes the ideal that teachers value having a high personal regard, concern for professional development, and continuous improvement as teachers.

These domains can guide future educators on what teaching competencies they need to develop to become more effective in their profession. For teachers handling assessment courses, these standards do incorporate values and skills unto the students and help drive them towards becoming efficient and effective assessors of student learning.

Conclusion

Assessment of Student Learning (ASESLE) courses are valuable to the programs of students majoring in education. Both teaching strategies and assessment strategies are important aspects in becoming an effective educator. Particularly, for a teacher teaching assessment courses, it is best to showcase good assessment practices to their students in order for them to visualize what assessment truly means. Moving from teaching to learning has also become a central idea in identifying best practices in teaching assessment. Sustaining the interest of the students is often done through group activities, structured exercises, class demonstrations, and field work. Being more task-based will enable the students to gain insights on their own progress and will in turn, develop their self-evaluation skills. The use of technology has been emphasized as one of the ways to teach assessment of student learning courses.

An effective teacher not only employs these teaching strategies, but they also maintain a mindset (that it is equally important) of aiming to develop the students' skills, knowledge and expertise in order for them to succeed in work and life - skills that were stated by the Partnership for 21st Century Skills (2009). Teachers are reminded that they are training these future educators to become effective teachers on all aspects and meet the expectations that the National Competency-based Teacher Standards (2006) have set. With these, the students' learning of assessment will become clearer to them, thus will keep them immensely interested and focus on various assessment tasks.

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