

Equity in Assessment

Assessment is described as “the process of gathering information about a learner’s performance using a variety of methods and materials in order to determine learners’ knowledge, skills, and motivation for the purpose of making informed educational decisions”(UDL, n.d.). Recent innovative approaches to assessment invite educators to consider questions such as:

- How can assessment support a broader definition of student success?
- What assessment practices most effectively empower students to own and advance their learning?
- How can we pursue equity through assessment for learning?

Being equity-minded, is a critical aspect of assessment. “Assessment, if not done with equity in mind, privileges and validates certain types of learning and evidence of learning over others, can hinder the validation of multiple means of demonstration, and can reinforce within students the false notion that they do not belong in higher education” (Montenegro & Jankowski, 2017, p. 5). Researchers argue that students must be provided with just and equitable means to demonstrate their learning. Culturally responsive assessment is offered as a vehicle for promoting more equitable outcomes for students. Assessments should be inclusive of all students to provide the greatest chance that various types of students are able to demonstrate their learning and mastery of course material. Such an approach fundamentally shapes the ways in which educators are designing courses and methods of assessment, including assignments, exams, and even deadlines. It requires being grounded in knowledge of the specific student population, using language that is appropriate for all students, acknowledging and integrating student needs and differences in development of learning outcomes, the selection of assessment tools or assignments, and in the use of the results.

**Equitable Practices in Assessment:
Assessing Through an Equity Lens**

Being equity-minded, is a critical aspect of assessment. A common underlying assumption (and barrier) to assessing diverse learner needs is the belief that while learners may learn in different ways, they must or should demonstrate their knowledge in the same way. Assessments should be inclusive of all students to provide the greatest chance that various types of students are able to demonstrate their learning and mastery of course material.

QUESTION:

Equity is reflected in my methods of assessment in the following ways:

EXAMPLE:

Learning Outcomes: learning outcomes must consider and reflect different ways of learning and the diverse ways in which students demonstrate learning. Culturally responsive teaching invites faculty to write learning outcome statements with and for students to increase student agency, personal investment in their own learning, and to foster student clarity about what is expected of them and how to demonstrate mastery of course material.

Differentiated Assessment: assess student learning before, during, and after instruction to better understand and build upon student knowledge and lived experience as well as to better facilitate learning. Examples of ways to include differentiated assessment include the use of in-class polling, clickers, exit-tickets, and reflection essays.

Demonstration of Learning: instructors may provide students with a list of different assignments that they may choose from. This provides students with a sense of agency and personal investment in how they earn the points needed in class and how they demonstrate their learning.

Culturally responsive rubrics, portfolios, and capstone projects can provide multiple methods of holistic formative assessment. Portfolios provide students with the opportunity to make connections between course concepts while applying them to personally meaningful situations. In

addition, because portfolios can be made available online, they can have an added benefit to students for use in marketing their skills.

EQUITY CHALLENGE!

Do my assignments provide students with different types of opportunities to demonstrate their mastery of course material? Do students have any choice in how they demonstrate their learning or are all students expected to demonstrate their learning in the same ways? Here is a challenge: aim to provide students with at least 3 different methods of assessment that allow them to demonstrate their mastery of course material.

RESOURCES:

- Bal, A., & Trainor, A.A. (2016). Culturally responsive experimental intervention studies: The development of a rubric for paradigm expansion. *Review of Education Research*, 86(2), 319-359.
- Montenegro, E., & Jankowski, N. A. (2017, January). Equity and assessment: Moving towards culturally responsive assessment (Occasional Paper No. 29). Urbana, IL: University of Illinois and Indiana University, National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA)
- National Center on Design for Universal Learning (n.d.). What is universal design for learning? Retrieved from <http://www.udlcenter.org/aboutudl/whatisudl>

Equitable Practices in Assessment: Developing Formative Assessments

Formative assessments are low risk activities that measure comprehension during or soon after instruction. These assessments let instructors know what concepts students may not have comprehended or understood. They may be informal or a formal (low stakes) quiz; they may be based on individual or group effort. The importance of the formative assessment is giving students immediate feedback on their learning or misconceptions and provide the instructor an opportunity to re-teach or provide additional learning experiences.

QUESTION:

After direct instruction about a topic, I assess student's comprehension in the following ways:

EXAMPLE:

Examples of formative assessments may include:

- After directed instruction of a concept, ask students to write a one-minute essay that explains the concept
- Thumbs Assessment: thumb up – I've got it; thumb sideways – give me a couple more examples; thumb down – I'm confused.
- Performance tasks such as solving a problem.
- Exit tickets that ask for three important concepts discussed in class.
- Group analysis of an historical document.
- Mini case study.

EQUITY CHALLENGE!

Do each of your units provide students an ample opportunity to test the depth of their understanding during a lesson as well as between lessons (prior to the final assessment)? How do you assess student learning on a concept, a type of analysis, or a problem prior to moving on to the next? Here's a challenge: aim for three or four different methods for students to understand the concept and the importance of each concept by use of a formative assessment.

RESOURCES:

- Barkley, Elizabeth F., & Major, Claire Howell. (2016). Learning assessment techniques: a handbook for college faculty. Hoboken, NJ John Wiley & Sons.
- Heacox, Diane. (2009). Making differentiation a habit. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit-Publishing.
- National Council of Teachers of Mathematics. (2007). What does research say the benefits of formative assessment are? (Research Brief). Reston, VA: author.
- On-Course. Conference notebook. An introduction to empowering learner-centered principles and strategies. Redwood City, CA: author.

Rubric for Culturally Responsive Lessons/Assignments

The five-column rubric below was developed by Jean Aguilar-Valdez (2015).

Criteria	Minimal	Emerging	Effective	Highly Effective
<p>VOICE Lesson/Assignment allows places for students to work together cooperatively or share their learning experiences, strengths, backgrounds, interests, and needs with the instructor and each other.</p>	No intentionally designed places for students to work together, work cooperatively, or share these things – it is all teacher-centered.	One brief place for working together or sharing, not directly integrated with the topic of the lesson(s), otherwise teacher-centered.	Several places for working together cooperatively or sharing, somewhat connected to the topic of the lessons – mostly student-centered.	Students work together cooperatively or share throughout, in ways deeply interwoven with the topic of the lesson(s) – fully student-centered.
<p>DIFFERENTIATED Lesson/Assignment provides opportunities for individual learners to express their learning in various ways, accounting for multiple learning styles.</p>	Only one way for all students to express their learning	Students may interact with material in more than one way, but final product(s) have only one way to be considered acceptable.	Several ways for students to express their learning.	Several ways for students to express their learning, which have been informed by student input and instructor knowledge of individual students' strengths and needs.
<p>ACCESS Lesson/Activity communicates ideas in several different ways</p>	Ideas communicated in only one way	Ideas communicated in two similar ways	Ideas communicated in three or more different ways	Ideas communicated in three or more different ways that are informed by student input and instructor knowledge of students' differing learning styles.
<p>CONNECTION Lesson/Activity incorporates real-life connections and representations from various cultures and life experiences.</p>	No or minimal real-life connections made or representations given.	One real-life connection made or represented from the experiences of the dominant culture.	More than one real-life connection made or represented but mostly from the experiences of the dominant culture.	More than one real-life connection made or represented from a variety of cultures and life experiences.

Criteria	Minimal	Emerging	Effective	Highly Effective
<p>HIGHER ORDER THINKING Lesson/Assignment provides avenues for students to engage in higher cognitive processing, applying learning to big-picture analysis and creative applications for learning.</p>	Rudimentary level recall and understanding is all that is asked for or expected.	Mostly recall and basic understanding, with only one or two opportunities for higher order applications and creative thinking.	Some higher order applications and creative thinking included, but only in one predetermined way.	Many opportunities for higher order applications and creative thinking, in several ways as originated from the students.
<p>SOCIAL JUSTICE Lesson/Assignment provides avenues for students to connect learning to social, political, or environmental concerns that affect them and their lives and enact change.</p>	No or minimal avenues for connection learning to social concerns that are relevant to the students.	One predetermined avenue to connect learning to social concerns relevant to the students and enact change.	Several predetermined avenues to connect learning to social concerns relevant to the students and enact change.	Students given opportunity to explore many avenues of their choosing that connect learning to social concerns that are relevant to them and enact change meaningful to them.
<p>EQUITY/DECOLONIZATION Attention paid to minimizing dominant discourses, deficit perspectives, and possible biases/micro-aggressions in instruction/language/expectation so students from non-dominant backgrounds (e.g. English language learners, students from poverty, students with special needs, students of various genders/sexual orientations) have access and can participate as readily as those from dominant backgrounds.</p>	The dominant discourse and perspective is the only one presented, and students who cannot access it will fail.	Some attention paid to making the discourse inclusive, but students are still expected to sink or swim.	Discourse and perspectives are presented in a variety of ways that are inclusive of non-dominant backgrounds, students given some multiple points of access.	Discourse and perspectives are presented in a variety of inclusive ways that honor students of non-dominant backgrounds, and all students of non-dominant backgrounds can access and feel included in the material.