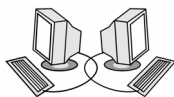


Chapter IX

Learner-Centered Assessment and Facilitation Techniques

with

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Making Connections

You have just finished grading the first exam and the results are in. What does the grade really mean? Did the participants of the course or program learn? How do you know? How will you assess learning at a distance? A fundamental step in systematic instructional design and delivery is deciding how to assess learning outcomes. A well-written instructional objective includes outcome measures. Making certain that the assessment strategies match the objectives is an important first step, a step that must not be overlooked. A frequent concern raised by distance educators is that online delivery takes more time to facilitate and assess than traditional classrooms. In this chapter, we will discuss the use of formative evaluation and authentic assessment techniques to determine instructional effectiveness and learning outcomes. To establish viable online programs, we need to optimize the amount of time educators spend online. Tactics for optimizing time spent facilitating online learning will conclude the chapter.

Introduction

Educators are always being asked two basic questions. Do you know what they are? You don't have to read a report by the National Commission of Excellence in Education (1984) to find out. What do employers, parents, and personnel in state accreditation agencies want to find out from you? Aren't they asking (1) How well are learners doing? and (2) How effectively are you (as instructors) teaching? How should we measure what and how much our learners understand? There is public and political pressure to explain learning. Through observation of the process of learning, the collection of feedback on learning, and the design of modest experiments, instructors can determine how learners respond to particular instructional approaches (Angelo & Cross, 1993).

Assessment refers to the broad area of monitoring the learning progress. Assessment is the umbrella term that covers a variety of data collection methods used to evaluate educational outcomes (Chase, 1999). It should occur both during instruction (formative) and at the end of instruction (summative). Angelo and Cross note four characteristics that define assessment (1993). First, assessment is learner-centered; its purpose is to assure student learning. Formative assessment is used to determine if learning is occurring during the process of instruction. It involves both the instructor and the learner and is mutually beneficial to each. If the instructor discovers that learners are struggling with the material, adjustments may need to be made with either the instructional methods or the processes of how the student goes about learning. Assessment can provide the information necessary to guide the instructor and learner in making those adjustments.

Assessment is instructor directed. It depends on the knowledge and professional experience of the instructor to determine who and what needs to be assessed. Assessment must be tailored to meet the needs of the learners, the instructor, and the content being taught. It is important to choose the right assessment technique to fit the situation.

Assessment must also be an on-going process. Multiple, simple assessment techniques will provide the instructor with sufficient information to alter instructional methods if necessary. Feedback can also be provided to the learners on how they can improve learning.

Finally, assessment builds on existing best practices by making it more systematic and more effective. Integrating assessment into the lesson plan makes it a seamless part of the course program.

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