Effective Assessment in Online Courses

The Trials of Teamwork and the Power of Alignment

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Experience with Teamwork Assessments

- Anatomy & Physiology
  - End of semester assessment
    - F2F – lab group peer review
    - Online – group work throughout
  - Semester-long project
    - Combined with other core objectives
Experience with Teamwork Assessments

• Non-majors Biology
  – Semester project
    • Covered all required core objectives
    • Culminated in presentations at the end of the semester
  – Embedded MC questions
  – Group assignment to review topic
The Benefits of Teamwork

• Group work throughout semester in online A&P
  – Decreased drop rate
  – Fostered friendship
  – Increased student comfort level
  – Increased student engagement
The Benefits of Teamwork in a Class Setting

• Non-majors biology group project
  – Before midterm
  – Built group dynamic early
  – Reviewed a historically difficult concept
  – Assessed on teamwork, not on content
What We’ve Learned

• Build in multiple opportunities for students to connect with one another
  – Formal group work
  – Informal discussions

• Encourage students to get to know one another
What We’ve Learned

• Don’t overuse the terms “group work” and “teamwork”
  – Often has negative connotations
• Emphasize communication within the group
  – Discussions (in-class or online)
  – Email
What We’ve Learned

• Teamwork can increase student engagement
  – With peers
  – With course content
  – With faculty (if structured correctly)

• Engagement increases retention.
Course Design to Promote Engagement

• **Active learning** (Hew, 2014; Nilson, 2018)
  – Blogs, wikis, interactive videos
  – Moderated discussions
  – Problem-based learning
  – Simulations
  – Group projects

• **Targeted feedback** (Nilson, 2018)
  – Requires clear assessment criteria

• **Assess as you go** (Boettcher & Conrad, 2016)

• **Create a safe, supportive, and welcoming environment** (Boettcher & Conrad, 2016; Majeski et al., 2017; Nilson, 2018)
Course Design to Promote Engagement

• Self-regulated learning
  – Setting goals and planning strategies
  – Help students reflect and monitor their learning (Brookfield, 2006; Nilson, 2018)
  • Reflection

• Encourage learners to be mindful of their processes and ways of thinking and those of others (Majeski et al., 2017)
Course Design to Promote Engagement

• Capture their attention
  – Introduce surprising or unexpected facts and insights (Nilson, 2018)
  – Draw them into inquiry with puzzles, paradoxes, challenges, or dilemmas (Hew, 2014; Nilson, 2018)
  – Provide diverse examples and models (Deschaine & Whale, 2017; Nilson, 2018)
  – Incorporate a wide range of activities (Nilson, 2018)
  – Create diverse learning experiences (Bain, 2004)
  – Vary presentation modalities (Nilson, 2018)
  – Use online polls periodically through lesson (Deschaine & Whale, 2017)
Course Design to Promote Engagement

• Ensure relevance
  – Make connections
    • Stories, examples, comparisons
  – Set meaningful goals
    • Help students focus on their future

• Encourage goal expectancy and self-efficacy
  – Visible path to success
  – Multiple opportunities for success
  – Motivational messages
  – Strategies for success
  – Explain the value of errors
Course Design to Promote Social Engagement

• Foster social belonging
  – Let them know you care (Bain, 2004)
  – Let students get to know you (Nilson, 2018)
  – Be authentic (Brookfield, 2006)
  – Early student-instructor interactions (Nilson, 2018)
  – Encourage peer interaction (Bain, 2004; Hew, 2016)
Course Design to Promote Social Engagement

- How to foster social belonging
  - Be present in the course (Hew, 2016; Boettcher & Conrad, 2016)
    - Social, teaching, and cognitive presence
  - Be responsive (Hew, 2016; Brookfield, 2006; Deschaine & Whale, 2017)
  - Explicit expressions of support (Nilson, 2018)
  - Explicit expectations (Boettcher & Conrad, 2016)
  - Personalize the course (Nilson, 2018)
Online Discussions

• **Teacher-centered or curriculum-centered** (Fischer, 2017)
  – “Instructor retains intellectual authority” (Fischer, 2017)

• **Student-centered** (Fischer, 2017)
  – Instructor is “an equal participant in a conversation” (Fischer, 2017)
  – Students think and analyze in a cooperative manner (Fischer, 2017)
  – The instructor becomes a facilitator (Fischer, 2017; Majeski et al., 2017)

• **Keep online discussions focused on the topic**
  (Brookfield, 2006; Majeski et al., 2017)
Course Design to Promote Teamwork

- Collaborative projects completed in stages (Fabricatore & Lopez, 2014)
  - Group communication with “consultants”
- Learning journals that require reflection (Fabricatore & Lopez, 2014)
- Course wiki for student collaboration (Hershock & LaVaque-Manty, 2012)
  - Key milestones for feedback
- Google Doc for team communication (Hershock & LaVaque-Manty, 2012)
  - Simultaneous access for team members
  - Commenting and chat features in Google Docs
Assessment Design

- Authentic Assessments
- Problem-based learning
- Complex/multi-step assignments
References


