Assessment-Based Instruction

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Over the years there has been a shift in thought surrounding the goal of education. The focus has shifted from the regurgitation of facts and dates to the incorporation of “information into life competency” (Hamilton, 2010, p. 1). With this shift has come the concept of assessment-based instruction. This paper examines assessment-based instruction by discussing key components involved in assessment-based instruction. Investigated is how assessments have changed over the year and how assessments are used to improve instruction and learning.

Key Components

The classroom is a multidimensional environment with many constituents. Instructors are accountable to students, parents, administrators, the community, and federal, state, and local governments. “Our educational system is driven by student outcomes as measured through standardized assessments” (Oberg, n.d., p. 2). To achieve these outcomes in a meaningful way teachers must come to know their students. “When teachers are fully informed about their students, they are better prepared to make appropriate instructional and curriculum decisions, and adapt, as necessary, their teaching practice to ensure success for all students” (Oberg, n.d., p. 2). Assessments in various forms are the tools by which teachers gain this vital understanding and enrich the learning experience.

“Assessment-based instruction, in its pure form, uses multiple assessment types throughout the course to effectively determine the level of cognitive understanding” (Hamilton, 2010, p. 1). The first key component to successful assessment-based instruction may be self-explanatory. Instruction is driven by assessment. This means that the information gathered from various assessments provides a guide for continual instruction to the varied learners in the class.
The next key component is that assessments take place throughout the course. This includes pre-assessment, formative assessments and summative assessments. Pre-assessment tools assess student readiness, interest, prior knowledge, and learning profiles. Formative assessments track student progress and address both cognitive and motivational factors. This allows the instructor to make instructional decisions and adjustments and to provide essential feedback to learners. Summative assessments determine student mastery of information, concepts, and skills.

Another vital component of assessment-based instruction is the types of assessments. While traditional assessments such as tests and quizzes provide valuable information, they may not provide the kinds of information needed for instructional decision making and instructional adjustments. “Using a variety of assessment formats allows for different learners to demonstrate their knowledge and skills in the best way they know” (Oberg, n.d., p. 6). Authentic assessments such as portfolios, presentations, journals, or mock interviews provide insight into what the student has learned and how they apply the knowledge. This allows the instructor to pinpoint learner’s instructional needs and adapt instruction accordingly.

Finally, a key component is the quality of the assessment tools. Assessments must have a clear purpose and target and must align with learning objectives. It is vital that assessments used be accurate and effectively communicated. Most of all the assessment must be fair and free from instructor bias. Authentic assessment tools should include a tool for evaluating the assessment such as a rubric to ensure that each learner is assessed equally.

How Assessments Have Changed

The shift in focus from “rote education to cognitive understanding” (Hamilton, 2010, p. 1) has brought about many changes in way that students are assessed. Traditional methods such
as tests containing multiple choice, true or false, and fill in the blank questions are still used and still relevant, but more authentic methods of assessment have gained popularity and acceptance by educational professionals.

Several factors have promulgated these changes in assessment policies and methods. First is the aforementioned shift from rote learning to learning that is relevant to “real life competencies” (Hamilton, 2010, p. 1). This shift has influenced curriculum, instructional methods as well as they ways in which learning is assessed.

“A second factor shaping educational assessment is increased public demand for accountability, which can be observed every day and in multiple forms especially in the press and in public and political discussions about the need to improve the educational system” (Pellegrino, 2004, p. 5). The demand for accountability has grown. The list of those involved in oversight of our educational system has grown. Administrators, federal, state and local governments, and the public at large all play a role and have a vested interest in the improvement of the educational system. According to Pellegrino (2004), “Using a value-added approach as a way to assess how our system is doing and to hold various entities accountable has become part of the everyday discussions among citizens, politicians, and educational professionals”.

Assessment practices have been influenced by four major forces. Pellegrino (2004) identifies these forces as psychometrics, cognition, curriculum, and socio-political context of education. Pellegrino (2004) points out that “understanding that assessment practice is the product of multiple streams of influence, including social policy and societal goals, theories of the mind and computational capacities, allows us to understand the evolution of assessment and answer key questions regarding what needs to change and why.”
Using Assessments to Improve Instruction and Learning

As the education community continues to evolve, the question of how to use assessments to improve instruction and learning moves further to the forefront of the conversation. According to Pellegrino (2004), powerful learning environments are centered on four components, knowledge, learners, assessments, and community. “Assessment-centered elements help make thinking visible to student, teachers and others in the learning community. Furthermore, these elements support an ongoing process of work and revision that is focused on deepening understanding” (Pellegrino, 2004, p. 11). What Pellegrino makes clear is that in the educational environment today, assessments can and must inform and improve the learning experience. Through well planned, well designed assessments teachers can identify not only student strengths and weaknesses but also their own. Assessments can help instructors evaluate the course objectives to determine if they are realistic. Instructional methods can be refined and adjusted to ensure that they are appropriate and effective.

Finally assessments are an interact part of the learning process providing students with valuable feedback. This feedback serves to reinforce successful learning and offers the learner information regarding his or her further learning needs.

Conclusion

Assessment-based instruction is vital to an added-value learning experience. A well planned, well designed, and well executed assessment process allows instructors to better meet learner’s needs. Assessments should take place throughout a course providing instructors and other stakeholders the information needed to make good well informed decisions regarding curriculum and instructional methods. Assessments must balance the needs of all constituents
with the needs of the learners. While traditional assessments are still useful authentic assessment tools must be incorporated into any good assessment program. For assessment-based instruction to be successful one must be able to honestly evaluate the assessments and then be willing to take the time to make the changes needed.
References

