AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT IN A VIRTUAL WORLD

Most faculty in higher education have progressed to an acceptance of the necessity of dealing with political accountability and economic implications of assessment. At the same time, virtual communities in ubiquitous online classes beg for authentic assessments to gage and assure an improvement in student learning; higher education has made the shift from a teacher-centered model to a learner-centered model in the virtual world.

Instructional technology and authentic assessments should be selected that match in the following order: the personality of the course objectives, the students, the instructor, and the institution. Multiple authentic assessments allow students an array of strategies through which to demonstrate their respective strengths and address their weaknesses in the virtual world of online education.

Assurance that learning is authentic and not assessment driven is critical; many critics say that we have far too much assessment and too many decisions are based on high stakes testing. As we build our virtual online communities, we owe it to students and ourselves to continue to explore authentic assessment strategies that are compatible with learner needs and sound academic practices.

This presentation/paper will provide a summary and analytical discussion of authentic evidences that demonstrate accountability for preparation of high quality candidates and the impact those graduates from two masters’ programs have on the learning of K-12 students. These two programs share collaborative experiences in assessment while preparing more than 425 special education and 320 library media personnel. While each program has elements in common, distinctive strands do exist in their models. The presentation will address the following key questions.
1. What data are critical for accountability measures to be effective? How do educators make informed responses to their critics?

Assessments are aligned with critical indicators across courses in two program areas. The assessments and resulting data are shared between two program areas of the same teacher education department. This data drives the decisions made by faculty as to the effectiveness of the program.

2. How do teacher educators know that candidates and graduates have a positive impact on PK-12 student learning? What are the innovative practices in assessing student learning? What data are available to support these practices?

   A. Positive impact on PK-12 student learning is documented through graduate surveys and performance activities such as teacher work sample, action research, case study reports, and quality community engagement experiences.
   B. Innovative practices in assessing student learning are documented through a multi-dimensional model involving cognitive, affective, and performance indicators. Cognitive knowledge and application are assessed through exams, projects, case studies, and research-based reports. Affective indicators are assessed with surveys, reflective essays, and incorporation of appropriate dispositions. Performance is assessed through video, teacher work sample, and action research.

3. How do teacher educators create a culture of evidence, self-assessment, and accountability within schools of education? How does this culture impact the performance of both faculty and candidates?

   A. Documentation of the assessment program and critical indicators are shared to effect increased quality and sustainment of competent graduates who work in K-12 settings.
   B. Faculty and student roles in these models are discussed and documented.
   C. Cultural indicators for each program are shared, along with the process for continuing assessment and accountability.

4. What are the evidence-based results of innovations in the preparation of educators? How have changes in curriculum, field and clinical experiences, admissions processes, and other areas impacted the quality of candidates and graduates?

   A. Changes in curriculum, field experiences, admission processes and other evidence-based results are shared between the two programs.
   B. Data on the quality of graduates and their effect on PK-12 students are gathered through graduate surveys, teacher work sample, action research projects, and feedback from clinical and field-based practitioners.