

Assessment

My practice is in a Community Development Project which is gender specific to women. The work is informed by the principles and practices of Community Development/Education, and has an anti-poverty and equality focus. The majority of participants have not completed upper secondary level and many would have no formal educational qualifications. The assessment explored was designed with the profile of the participants in mind. The group work engaged is highly participatory and consultative. This essay explores one assessment aspect of a FETAC level 4 'Personal Effectiveness' module delivered to a group of fifteen women, who used the renovation of a garden as a vehicle of learning. Kelly (2004) suggests that 'all teachers, whether consciously or unconsciously, are continuously assessing their pupils...' (p.126). Formative and summative assessment is theorised as both are an integral part of the learning discussed. The summative assessment was criterion referenced. The essay looks at some assessment strategies used to overcome educational disadvantage. A detailed look at some of the summative assessments for the personal effectiveness FETAC level 4 module is examined in relation to Bloom's taxonomy (1956).

The group participants had mixed ability, some struggling with literacy and others with limited ability with the written word. Some participants accessed the adult literacy service before and during their attendance. However participants were generally able to express themselves very well verbally. It could be argued that the reason for lack of literacy skills in some cases may be lack of opportunity, or the need for the use of alternative learning styles. Consequently it can be frustrating for intelligent women not to have competent written skills to assist self expression. Therefore I used video for some assessments, and group activities for others. There was a focus on collective learning in contrast to the individualised system that they had experienced first time around in formal education.

Writing journals was facilitated in pairs and I strategically suggested that participants with contrasting skills work together. For example a woman with good verbal and comprehension skills working with a woman with good writing skills. Race (2007) suggests that 'pairs can be useful when a stronger student can help a weaker one' (p.27). However it was interesting to note that in some pairings the stronger student was often the student that was weaker at writing.

In experiential learning the focus is on integrating and using the skills that are learned rather than writing about them. This was a motivating factor considering that many of the students would not have experienced getting a good grade or positive feedback in their previous learning experiences. The focus of the learning sessions was on what students 'could do' and the achievement of new skills, rather than what they struggled with. Anderson *et al* (2005) suggest that assessment should be valid, reliable, transparent and motivating. Therefore during assessment I was concerned with the use of personal effectiveness skills and not the quality of writing. The assessment criteria (discussed later) are the same or similar to the learning outcomes for the section discussed, and are therefore transparent.

Formative Assessment

Formative assessment is an integral part of the learning whether the courses offer accreditation or not. Formative assessment is sometimes planned and sometimes would naturally occur within a learning session. McCauley & McMillan (2010) suggest that formative assessment is 'consistent with constructivists theories of learning' and motivation (p.2). Both self assessment and tutor/facilitator assessment was facilitated with the learning group discussed here. Self assessment involves asking students to self monitor their progress, and 'identifies discrepancies' with desired outcomes and discusses strategies that can improve learning (McCauley & McMillan 2010, p.5). The learners were already familiar with formative assessment involving self assessment and tutor feedback. Assessment '...seems like a wasted opportunity if it is not used as a means of letting students know how they are doing and how they can improve' (Anderson, *et al* 1998 :68). A formative assessment was facilitated where each participant presented a plan and an action for the garden project and justified their suggestions. Peer and tutor feedback was facilitated, with regards to their use of personal effectiveness skills. Formative assessment can have a positive impact on the motivation and achievement of students. Cauley & McMillian (2010) and Anderson *et al* suggests that formative assessment involves the following:

- The provision of clear learning targets (formative assessment is most effective when students know what teachers expect of them)
- Offer feedback about progress toward meeting learning targets (mistakes could be treated as opportunities for learning)
- Attribute student success and mastery to moderate effort (attributing effort is encouraging and contributes to learning)
- Encouraging student self-assessment (self evaluation can assist students to identify further learning possibilities)

- Help students set attainable goals for improvement (teachers feedback can enhance students belief in themselves)

The students were familiar with tutor, peer and self assessment in formative exercises throughout the project. Biggs recognises that teachers need to be careful using group projects, and suggests that 'peer evaluation of contribution is one way of making them more acceptable' (2007, p.187). During the project work discussed here self assessment was also facilitated at the summative assessment stage.

Many changes in roles and work practice are envisaged by Kember (2009), Biggs (1999), and Race (2007) in a shift from traditional lectures and assessment towards more student centred approaches. This perceived shift appears to be not only effective regarding learning and assessment methods, but also facilitates a more respectful and equitable way of teaching. In the community sector the varied approaches to learning and assessing have enabled students to remain engaged in a deeper learning. Also a significant issue is that the learning happens at the student's pace, rather than entirely directed by the constraints of the curriculum and assessment guidelines. Biggs (1999) SOLO taxonomy represents a learning cycle which can be used to assess the depth of learning of students (as discussed in assignment 1).

It is also suggested that motivation will be positive if the learning environment is safe (McCauley & McMillan (2009), Biggs (1999), and Race (2007)). Attributing effort is also encouraging with regards to early engagement groups and essential in terms of motivation. Therefore the implications of formative assessment theory both enhance and validate this learner's practice. The enhancement will involve implementing all five of the key principles discussed above. *'Assessment should not be seen as an end in its own right, but should be delivering useful learning payoff to students'* (Anderson, Brown and Race. 1998, p.69).

The assessment entailed 100% continuous assessment. Students were also expected to produce a portfolio documenting their learning. The continuous assessment took the form of groupwork activities with an individual element, journal writing in pairs, video of teamwork activity involving the whole group, and videoing a verbal evaluation. Race (2007) suggests that a concern of continuous assessment is that the range of learning-by-doing exercises may be too narrow. With regard to the above methods I realise that the assessment was designed with consideration for the students that had difficulty writing. Consequently this could have been at the expense of students who were more comfortable writing assessments than

participating in group activities. Fortunately in this instance I estimate that only two women out of the fifteen would have been more comfortable writing, and found groupwork challenging.

The assessments also involved portfolios which documented student's learning. However the four assignments that the portfolio contained were individually marked and the portfolio only involved organising the material. Other material that captured and supported the learning examined included a DVD of interactive teamwork activity and evaluation, and creative groupwork exercises. Race (2007) suggests in relation to portfolios that 'ownership of the evidence can sometimes be in doubt'; therefore it was advantageous to also have a DVD of the activity as well as photographic evidence (p.59). Also a significant factor was that the teamwork element of the assessment satisfied the criteria of two FETAC modules, hence saving time and resources. By exploring interpersonal skills through a teamwork exercise, it was possible to satisfy the requirements for a teamwork exercise in FETAC level 4 Drama which was also facilitated.

The Summative Assessment of Interpersonal Skills Section of 'Personal Effectiveness Module' Level 4

The summative assessment at the end of each unit was criterion referenced. 'Interpersonal Skills' section of the module was explored through a teamwork exercise, which is examined in this section, and also discussed in relation to Bloom's taxonomy. Before the exercise students were given the date of assessment, assessment brief guidelines and marking criteria. The students then carried out the teamwork exercise which was videoed.

The next day students were invited to a one-to-one critical learning session with the tutor, which involved self-assessment. Race (2007) suggests that involving students in their own assessment 'can let them in to the assessment culture they must survive' (p.85). The students were asked how they felt the exercise went for them and on reflection what they would change, in relation to their performance and the assessment guidelines. In this instance dialogue was engaged around the student's performance, and marks were allocated by the student and at times negotiated with the tutor. For each aspect of assessment they were asked to refer to their assessment criteria, and comment on the following:

Assessment (Outcome) Criteria	Marks
Give a clear description of the activity *(Bloom's comprehension domain)	25%
Examine team roles adapted during the exercise*(Bloom's Analysis domain)	25%
Demonstrate insight into own teamwork role*(Bloom's Application domain)	25%

Then each student was invited to allocate marks out of 25% in each instance outlined above. *Bloom (1956) cited in Anderson & Krathwohl (2001) and colleges identified three domains of educational activities, cognitive, affective, and psychomotor. The activities discussed are from Bloom's cognitive domain. Bloom's six major categories are: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation (Anderson and Krathwohl 2001). The use of the above verbs suggests that this section of assessment covered three levels of knowledge.

The final part of the assessment for this section was a verbal evaluation carried out by each student in the company of the learning group on video, which includes comments by peers and tutor. This satisfied the final part of the assessment criteria which required the students to carry out the following:

Assessment / Outcome Criteria	Marks
Evaluate the exercise *(Bloom's Evaluation domain)	25%

Marks were allocated by the tutor for this section. In relation to *Blooms taxonomy of learning domains the above assessment covered four different categories in the cognitive domain. The outcome/assessment illustrating verbs employed suggests a deep learning was facilitated. Although the module was at an introductory level, the learning and understanding facilitated was integrated throughout with the life experience of mature women. In this learning instance the comprehension, application, analysis and evaluation categories of knowledge explored suggests high level of deep learning (Bloom, 1956, Biggs, 1999, Schön 1987).

In conclusion it is apparent that difficulty with writing skills does not suggest that limited understanding exists; and it is important that teachers/facilitators involved in adult learning should keep this in mind. Krathwohl (2002) suggests that Bloom's taxonomy is effective towards 'determining congruence between educational objectives, activities and assessments'. The activities engaged during learning sessions are also aligned with the

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assessment and outcomes, which suggests constructive alignment was realised according to Biggs (1999). This essay has explored assessment through the integration of theory and practice. An evaluation of assessment was analysed through the deconstruction of assessment practice, design and activities. Formative and summative assessment modes were explored and critically reviewed in relation to my practice and the nature and purpose of assessment was fully explored.

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