

Curriculum Evaluation

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I have no known conflict of interest to disclose.

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Introduction

The job of teachers is to help their students to learn the content that the teachers are assigned to teach, which means that the students are the teachers' customers. Since they have customers, teachers ought to consider the need for customer service in their job. An important aspect of customer service is to know your customers and to listen to your customers. For teachers, this means learning who their students are, getting to know them, and paying attention to both how they are doing in class and what they have to say. Curriculum is the tool that teachers use to accomplish their job, but through customer service they are able to evaluate their curriculum and recognize the need to adjust to ensure that all of their students are given the maximum opportunity to learn the material.

Importance of Curriculum Evaluation

Curriculum is the basis for classroom instruction, so if it is not written well, the students' learning will suffer. Writing curriculum for a class is an important task, but evaluating that curriculum afterwards is an additional responsibility on the shoulders of teachers and is very important as well (Struble, n.d.). In order to determine if the curriculum is written well, educators need to intentionally evaluate the curriculum. The evaluation of the curriculum is not as simple as proofreading a paper before turning it in. The content needs to be carefully evaluated both before it is taught and during the class to ensure that it will meet the needs of the students that are in the class.

Standards and Objectives

Standards and objectives are very important and should be carefully evaluated or carefully written, to ensure appropriate interpretation of their meaning. Standards and objectives

are the basis of what students are expected to learn in a class but are really the bare minimum and do not constitute the entirety of what will be taught (Wiggins & McTighe, 2012). Because those standards are sometimes vague or unclear, it is important for the teacher to carefully evaluate each one to ensure sufficient understanding to apply it to the curriculum and classroom instruction (Wiggins & McTighe, 2012). To counter this issue, teachers who have the ability to write their own objectives need to be sure to write very clearly what they intend for each objective, ensuring that any other teacher who uses the material understands and is able to implement the intention. This careful writing of clear objectives requires significant consideration into ways that words in the objectives may be misinterpreted and whether or not there is a way to write it a different way that could prevent misinterpretation.

Assessment for Learning

Although the term “assessment” may elicit thoughts of a written test that students take, that is not what assessment for learning is about. As the second part of the term indicates, assessment for learning is about evaluating how students are doing in order to make adjustments to help students learn (Jayne 2015). It would be easy to confuse assessment of learning with assessment for learning, but they are not quite the same thing. According to Jayne (2015), assessment of learning is an evaluation after learning to determine what has been learned such as a final exam, often referred to as a summative assessment; meanwhile, assessment for learning is an assessment that goes on throughout the class. In addition, Jayne (2015) points out that the difference between an assessment for learning and a formative assessment, which both happen during the class, is that a formative assessment happens occasionally during the class while the assessment for learning is a continuous evaluation throughout the class.

Assignments and Assessment

Writing or grading assessments and assignments can be a challenge. Regardless how hard a teacher tries to write objective assessments assignments, the grading aspect will always include some level of objectivity (McMillan, 2000). However, Wiggins & McTighe (2012) point out that it is important to develop the grading criteria ahead of time and let the students know what those criteria are. By developing and sharing criteria with students, the teacher is making the grading process easier but also giving students some additional information on what is expected of them, which will naturally help students to perform better (Wiggins & McTighe, 2012). Nevertheless, Wiggins & McTighe (2012) clarify that the criteria should not be developed for a specific assignment. Instead, they recommend developing the general criteria of what type of assignment the student is being asked to complete regardless of the specific assignment, which will make grading more consistent and focus on the aspects of the assignment that make the specific assignment effective for what the task is designed for (Wiggins & McTighe, 2012).

Validity and Reliability

The terms validity and reliability are often used in questions about whether or not a test is well-prepared and able to gather accurate data (Darr, 2005b). The issue of reliability is a little bit simpler to explain in general than validity, but they are both as important. According to Darr (2005a), reliability is about the consistency of assessment results, and the more assessment results are available over time, the better the evaluation of reliability can be. Since it is not possible to assess students on everything that they are taught in class, it is important that teachers verify the validity of an assessment and that it sufficiently covers enough of the content that they can get an accurate and valid evaluation of the students' learning (Darr, 2005b). This verification includes ensuring that there are not other factors in the assessment that get in the way of a true assessment the students' abilities in the actual task of concern (Darr, 2005b). While this aspect of

validity could refer to students who have a barrier in the way of doing well on an assessment, it could also refer to student who is able to infer correct answers without necessarily knowing the answers because of the way the test was written, such as in many multiple-choice tests, which have questions where one answer is completely wrong, a second and potentially a third are pretty easy to rule out, and it is really down to one or two possible answers.

Differentiation of Instruction

Differentiation of instruction is about knowing who the students are and adjusting the lesson content to help the students learn, which is more difficult to do than to comprehend (Tomlinson, 2014; Wiggins & McTighe, 2012). There are a lot of factors that would create reason to differentiate materials, but all of them boil down to helping the students to learn the material. There are differences due to disabilities, abilities, cultural differences, language differences, home environments, and many others that could get in the way of students' learning, and teachers need to be aware of these factors and understand that each student is a unique individual with unique needs (Tomlinson, 2014). Acknowledging these differences in their students, teachers need to make adjustments, differentiation, to their instruction to ensure that all the students are able to learn the material (Wiggins & McTighe, 2012).

Culturally Responsive Teaching

Culturally responsive teaching ties right into differentiation as it is focused, in part, on recognizing where the students are at and making some adjustments to the lessons. To help with culturally responsive teaching, teachers ought to get to know their students more, learning about their home environment, what they like to do outside of school, and what their interests are (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). This information will help the teachers in understanding what types of teaching adjustments will help the student to learn better. These adjustments may include

something as simple as changing what a student is asked to read for a specific assignment to something that the student can connect with (Fink, 2017). However, it does not mean avoiding giving a student a specific assignment because it may be a controversial topic for that student. According to Gay (2002), culturally responsive teaching actually confronts controversial issues and emotional aspects of teaching such as values and beliefs instead of avoiding them and does not go out of its way to emphasize the actions of specific individuals just because they belong to a specific race disproportionately compared to other minority groups.

Feedback

There are a few types of feedback that occur in the classroom, including teacher to student feedback, student to student feedback, student to teacher feedback, and more (Jayne, 2015; Wiggins & McTighe, 2012). While Jayne (2015) focuses on various aspects of teacher to student feedback and student to student feedback, Wiggins and McTighe (2012) discuss feedback coming from colleagues, teacher observations, assessments, and student to teacher feedback. The feedback that Wiggins and McTighe (2012) discuss is generally more useful for curriculum evaluation as they are a little more curriculum focused, and the other types of feedback are more for the students' benefit. These types of feedback can give the teacher some information on how well the students are learning and how well the lesson is coming across to the students and, therefore, what may need to be adjusted (Wiggins & McTighe, 2012).

Application of Curriculum Evaluation

Teachers can and should apply all the concepts discussed above, but first they must recognize the importance of evaluating their curriculum. Next, teachers need to carefully evaluate their standards to identify the true intention of the standard. Teachers then need to review their curriculum very carefully to ensure that it is culturally accurate and covers cultural-

based content appropriately. Once teachers learn who their students are, they can determine what type of adjustments they may need to make right from the start both for culturally responsiveness as well as other differentiation. Throughout the instruction process, teachers ought to continue to evaluate where their students are in order to adjust as necessary, including providing some assessments without necessarily providing grades to see what may need to be adjusted. For those items that are graded, teachers should make a point to write clear criteria ahead of time and share it with the students. Teachers should also consider carefully the reliability and validity of their assessments by reviewing the consistency of results and ensuring that there is nothing in the way of accurate results. All throughout the teaching and assessments, teachers should be seeking and responding to the feedback that they receive and evaluating what worked and what did not work to determine what needs to be adjusted.

Personal Reflection

The current curriculum process that we have at my department could use some improvement. As it is set up now, it rarely involves any assessments at all; however, those assessments that are included are not evaluated for validity or reliability. I do not believe that I would have the pull to get more assessments to be included based on the set up of the department and how things operate, but I certainly could start working on evaluating the validity and reliability of those tests that we do have. I believe that the changes could be quite effective, especially as I know that most of our assessments that we have had are too easy for most students and many could take the assessments before taking the class and pass. Yet we had a couple of assessments recently that swung to the opposite side of the spectrum, were too difficult for the personnel that we have to do well, and were not really evaluating learning. By correcting this

issue, I will be helping the spiritual needs of my students by helping to reduce their frustration and give them a proper balance instead, which Scripture points out in Proverbs 11:1 is important.

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