

Evaluating Curriculum for Teaching the Total Student

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Curriculum must be evaluated against a clearly stated objective, informed by valid and reliable assessment, compassionately address student needs, and actively engage in bidirectional feedback that directs quality instruction. Comparing curriculum objectives against the skills being evaluated provides teachers with the understanding necessary to effectively implement those standards, ensuring students are demonstrating independent proficiency (Bartlett, 2015; Wiggin and McTighe, 2012). Assessment for Learning (AfL) allows teachers and students to share in the learning process through effective, continual, and objective directed evaluation. (Bartlett, 2015; Padmanabha, 2021). All student assignments must be thoroughly evaluated for proper content, quality, and process to obtain valid and reliable information that ensures instruction accurately depicts student understanding and effective teaching methodology (Darr, 2005a; Wiggin and McTighe, 2012). Equitable learning for all students requires teachers to empathetically differentiate instruction and become culturally responsive to address the holistic needs of the learner through constructive feedback (Bartlett, 2015; Tomlinson, 2014; Villegas, 2022; Westman 2021).

Overview of Curriculum Evaluation

Evaluating curriculum effectively requires a full understanding of the learning objectives as well as the student's prior knowledge making instruction the vehicle that moves the learner from where they currently are academically to where they should be based on the standard. Khan et al. (2019) describes curriculum evaluation as the process of setting achievement goals and providing assessment informed instruction that ensures the learner meets those goals.

Importance of Curriculum Evaluation

Curriculum evaluation requires the teacher to become an example of self-assessment by studying his/her instruction methods and assessments to maximize student learning and empower students to set their own goals and evaluate their learning (Bartlett, 2015). Teaching and learning are anchored by standards and objectives, informed by assessment and implemented with compassion for the total child.

Standards and Objectives

Teachers must fully understand the standards, implement relevant instruction, and assess against learning objectives multiple times to ensure students are performing the expected skills independently (Bartlett, 2015). Comparing curriculum objectives against the assessment or skills being evaluated is the best method of fully understanding what the teacher is preparing the student to accomplish (Wiggin and McTighe, 2012). Teachers can ensure students are meeting required standards of performance through consistent formative assessments that monitor progress of skill building tasks and prepare the student for larger goals such as projects, reports, and high stakes testing (Bartlett, 2015; Wiggin and McTighe, 2012). Assessment can be used by teachers to guide instruction and by students to monitor their own progress. Assessment of learning determines the extent and manner in which the student is learning, and assessment for learning is a process in which the student engages to reaching self-set goals (Bartlett, 2015). All assessments need clearly defined goals that articulate what success looks like for the learner (Wiggin and McTighe, 2012). For example, if a lesson is evaluated by teacher observation of the student's critical thinking and collaboration, clear expectations involving the roles and responsibilities of each student as well as measurable outcomes of their critical thinking should be presented to the students prior to beginning the project.

Assessment for Learning

Properly applied AfL is an effective, continual, and goal-oriented evaluation that guides the teacher in real time to add questions, shift instruction, or break the lesson into smaller objectives (Bartlett, 2015; Padmanabha, 2021). When free to express misconceptions students work their way to proper understanding, take an active role in AfL, and develop a growth mindset through continual feedback (Heritage and Wylie, 2018; McMillan and Moore, 2020). The first step in applying AfL is establishing SMART goals and developing an effective way to monitor student progress. Then, teachers can apply AfL with rich and meaningful metacognitive activities that reveal how the student is arriving at the solutions rather than simply knowing the correct answer (McMillan and Moore, 2020). This guides students into examining their own thinking, engaging in self-assessment, and setting their own learning goals (Padmanabha, 2021). Bartlett (2015) describes the application of mini-summative investigations in which goal specific questions are “passed” like a basketball to gather various perspectives giving the students opportunities to solve problems collaboratively.

Assignments and Assessment

Assignments should be created with clearly stated standards that quantify the extent to which the student will understand the concepts and apply the knowledge gained from instruction (Wiggin and McTighe, 2012). Detailed analytic scoring rubrics are a valuable tool for evaluating students on the content, quality, and process of the assignments they complete. Teachers must ensure students are aware of the intended impact or purpose of the assignment and provide detailed requirements preparing the students to create quality content that is creative and complete. The rubric will evaluate the quality and relevance of the student's product development process such as following directions or collaborating with classmates. When teachers want only a brief idea of the student's achievement a holistic rubric that generates only one rating can be

used, but most often an analytic rubric will be needed to give specific feedback on each type of criteria. For example, a student performing a skit on a historical event would need to be critiqued on impact, accuracy of the event, quality of the performance, and method of research and planning.

Validity and Reliability

Valid and reliable assessment ensures that data directing instruction is accurate in revealing what the student knows, and the teaching methods are consistently effective (Darr, 2005a). Validity judges how accurately the interpretation of assessment results proves or disproves the intended result, and reliability is the consistency of those results across various tasks and environments (Darr, 2005a; Hickey, 2014). Making time for ensuring teaching and assessment methods are repeatable and accurately interpreted deepens instruction beyond surface knowledge and promotes relevant assessments with which teachers can plan more effective instruction (Darr, 2005b). Wiggins and McTighe (2012) promote a valid and reliable method for assessment with clear standards in which students take on a meaningful role and present a relevant product to an authentic audience demonstrating mastery of a real goal. To accomplish their goal, students must plan their projects with the end product and impact in mind. When students are working through content to create a complex product such as a science experiment with many elements, teachers can collect a minimum of three unique work samples on the same topic to triangulate the student's performance and increase the validity and reliability of the teacher's interpretation of student proficiency (Darr, 2005a). Darr (2005b) provides a validity checklist that allows teachers to connect objectives, skills, and assessment like demonstrating Newton's laws of motion to solve a real-world problem and presenting the findings to a real audience.

Differentiation of Instruction

When applying objectives to assignments, teachers must remember to go beyond simply presenting information and strive to create an environment in which students can make meaning of appropriate content through a relevant process to demonstrate learning with a quality product (Tomlinson, 2014). The teacher must take into consideration many aspects of the student including readiness, interests, and learning preferences and with empathy address student needs that extend beyond the curriculum but greatly influence learning such as self-efficacy (Westman, 2021). Empathetic teachers set student centered goals that consider the total child and provide an equitable learning experience in which all students make equal yet distinct progress. Every student must receive group instruction, but struggling students should receive more small-group or individualized instruction than advanced learners. Continuous formative assessment should be applied to monitor SMART goals articulating the information the student should know, concepts he/she will understand, and the skills he/she will demonstrate (Tomlinson, 2014). Heterogeneous grouping helps students expand their thinking, but the students can also benefit from moving into homogeneous groups to grow more foundational skills or extend learning through more complex applications (Westman, 2021). A Bible lesson could be presented with rich authentic conversation from a big question followed by heterogeneous grouping to brainstorm life application and other biblical references to the same topic, and finally, students could divide into homogeneous groups that focus on a variety of skills that ranges from foundational to transformational (Tomlinson, 2014).

Culturally Responsive Teaching

Culturally responsive teachers are students of their students and endeavor to acquire information on language, culture, interests, and preferences shared by a community or family (Villegas, 2022). Teachers must shed the misconception that students will chart their own course

to the table of learning; as Gay (2022) states, teachers must invest in students accepting nothing less than the best from each student. Fink (2024) details practical strategies for as Villegas (2022) states, building bridges from current experience to new academic challenges. Fink (2024) suggests displaying words and images around the classroom that are meaningful to the students from diverse backgrounds. He also suggests making time to empathetically discuss topics relevant to the community in which the students live. Teachers must take the responsibility of educating each student seriously and offer language support for students who are not fluent enough to engage with the instructional content (Media Matters, 2009). If ELL specialists are not available, teachers can use technology or help from other teachers or students to offer translations of important content enabling the student to continue to progress academically despite their developing language abilities.

Feedback

Student performance on unit assignments and varied assessments provide valuable feedback on the effectiveness of the differentiated instruction and the extent of achievement toward the objective (Wiggins and McTighe, 2012). Feedback that informs learning occurs at various points in the learning process and should be constructive, goal driven, student focused, and develop learners into assessors of learning (Bartlett, 2015). Feedback is any verbal or written discussion between teacher and student that reveals strengths and needs to support and direct the learning process. During group collaboration, teachers must listen to the conversations students are having and at the appropriate time guide their thinking through praise and avoid giving too much information or negative feedback. Bartlett (2015) suggests teachers sit with each group of students and guide them into giving feedback on themselves, peers, and the quality of the assignment. Teachers must continually check student progress through the process of giving and

receiving feedback, and mini-assessment activities create structured opportunities for teachers to evaluate student progress against the objective. A mini-assessment could consist of a few big questions and student responses using mini-whiteboards, but teachers must also ask students to explain their thinking to ensure they are arriving at their conclusions logically.

Personal Reflection

I have grown as a curriculum evaluator specifically in my ability to identify skill specific objectives students should demonstrate and methods of continual assessment to evaluate progress toward those skills. Evaluating curriculum also means explaining curriculum objectives, process, and evaluation to students. Teaching is more effective when I encourage students to engage in the learning process by setting their own SMART goals and monitoring their progress. Students value learning more when they understand the purpose and objective of the instruction, assignments, and assessment. My first responsibility as a Christian educator is teaching students to value truth and humbly seek to improve in knowledge and action. As teachers, we strive to build self-motivated learners who accurately assess their own understanding and set appropriate goals. The apostle Paul writes to his student Timothy, “For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe. Command and teach these things. Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity” (English Standard Version, 2001/2016). I pray that my students will become self-reflective learners who humbly seek truth and compassionately live it out.

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