



Assessing Students Classically

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Lesson 4: Robyn
Burlew on Meaningful
Assessments

Outline:

Planning Assessments

- Keep in mind the ultimate goals.
- Though you ought to prepare assessments ahead of time, you should edit them based on what you actually taught.
- You signal what is important by what you put on the test.
- John Carver: “A crude measure of the right things beats a precise measure of the wrong thing.”
- Testing is always going to be crude when you are attempting to assess things like loves and growth.
- Do not shy away from a good question just because of the pressures to have some sort of objective solution.
- Experience helps you to have an idea of what is most important. Seek out more experienced advice.
- There are facts that are important and those that are less important but interesting for the sake of story (“trivia”).
- Trivia makes the story interesting but is NOT test material.
- Be sure you are not giving “gotcha questions.”
- Make it clear exactly what you want the students to know.
- Do NOT “hype” the test.

Types of Assessment Questions

- **Recall** – require students to recall information or concepts.
- **Recognition** – give information and ask for students to give the context or an explanation to demonstrate recognition.
- **Routine** – provide question that follows a familiar pattern (often a translation type or math problem).
- **Non Routine** or **Novel** – provide a question that does not follow a familiar pattern, but that you are confident students can use the skills they have learned to reason their way to the solution. Be careful with this type, but it can provide valuable information of the thought process of the students.



Explanation – ask students to write out an explanation of some concept or question. This can also be used for synthesis.

Grading

- What you write should serve to help students.
- Consider just circling the wrong answers and having students correct their own test.
- Make sure students have access to the correct answers.
- Do not write too much because the students might become overwhelmed.
- Be clear on what the red pen marks mean – it is constructive, instructional, and gives hope of improvement.
- If you are not careful, discussion of grading can add to test hype.
- Students “earn” credit; you do not “take off” credit.

Handing Back Work

- Find a proper time so that students will actually consider how they might improve.
- Have model answers available.
- Give time for questions to be answered.
- Over time students should get to a point where they can predict what sort of things will be on the test.