

Creating an Assessment Plan

Understanding students as the foundation of assessment

Liz Hartline, Presenter

About Me

- Instructor, Early Childhood Education
 - Background: Teacher, Preschool Director, Special Needs Coordinator in New York and San Francisco
 - Passionate advocate for authentic assessment that informs curriculum :)
 - Seriously, I had a lecture on it last week in my ECED 105 class
-

The lens of Early Childhood Education on assessment

My experience in the field of ECE has informed my lens on assessment in several major ways:

- The impetus to know where students are coming from and potential barriers in order to know our assessments measure what they claim to and not other things
 - Using formative assessment (what are you learning/what can you do now) in conjunction with summative assessment (what have you learned/what have you mastered)
 - In summative assessment, focus on the concepts and skills, rather than the minutiae
-

How Head Start shaped my view of
understanding students

We have to know where are students are coming from and potential barriers in order to know our assessments measure what they claim to.

Handout: “About You” Questionnaire

Each of these questions is designed to give me knowledge of potential roadblocks for learning, or issues I should know ahead of time.

Some things I found out from this survey

(that I would not have found out otherwise, or that would have taken a while)

- Most of my students do not have printers at home
- Several students who appeared to be English proficient were not native English speakers
- Which students were caregivers, either for children or other adults
- Which students were working full time in addition to school
- Voluntary disclosure of learning needs (ADHD, dyslexia, physical pain with prolonged sitting, slow learner)
 - (None of these students is connected to ACCESS)
- Voluntary disclosure of mental health flags (recent divorce, death of a child, anxiety disorders, PTSD/difficult readjustment to civilian life)

Their answers inform my practice.

- Knowing which students do not have a working computer has prompted me to allow hand-written submissions for those who are interested
- Knowing that most of my students do not have printers has prompted me to allow digital submissions of assignments
- Knowing which students are not native English speakers has prompted me to slow down, and to be able to interpret roadblocks and misunderstandings from a cultural lens
- Knowing that some students take the bus reminds me to make sure to open my classroom door ahead of time so that they're not waiting in the hallway, and to end class on time
- Knowing that a student has severe dyslexia has prompted me to allow her to turn in certain reflection assignments via audio recording
- Knowing that I have students dealing with anxiety disorders has prompted me to do fewer whole-class presentation assignments and do smaller group work in their place
- Knowing that one of my students is a vet with complicated medical issues and readjusting poorly has prompted me to view behavior that may seem otherwise antisocial (putting her head in her hands, standing up at odd times) as a response to easily triggered migraines and physical pain

Understanding people creates empathy when they can't/don't follow through, and lets us know how we can better support them.

Formative vs. Summative Assessment

Formative Assessment:

Assessment used to inform
and improve instruction

think: in class assignments

Summative Assessment:

Assessment used to
evaluate acquisition of
knowledge and skills after
teaching is complete

think: quizzes, final
projects

Both have their place! But in adult ed we tend to overly rely on summative assessment.

Relying entirely on summative assessment allows more room for cultural bias and life pressures to skew students ability to show what they can do.

It also increases the possibility that students aren't understanding - or that they've already mastered the material - without our knowledge.

Potential options for formative assessments

Independent worksheets or mini-quizzes that are reviewed and graded in different colors in class and left by students so that you can see their original answers

Practical skill applications (give it to them in class instead of as homework!)

Peer-reviewed work

Research & teach-back in-class assignments

Etc., etc., etc.

Things to be aware of in summative assessments

● Projects

- Biased towards full-time students, those without jobs, those who are not caregiving for others
- Can be difficult to manage multiple steps for students with organizational/attentional challenges (like ADHD)

● Papers

- Again, biased towards full-time students, those without jobs, those who are not caregiving for others, as well as those with access to computers
- Bias towards native English speakers
- Bias towards those who are better writers - which, unless you are an English teacher, may not be what you're trying to know about your students

● Exams

- Trigger anxiety responses and hormone surges - prevent ability to show skills
 - Bias towards native English speakers
 - Implicitly assess other skill sets - test taking skills, attentional skills, speed reading and comprehension (more on this later)
 - Tricky to assess proper competency (more on this later)
-

Caveat: I know that I am in a privileged position, of having a relatively small number of students who I can know well.

The takeaway isn't that we need to be individualized instructors to each of our students. The point is this: we have to assess: we may as well do it well.

When we do use summative
assessment: crafting them mindfully

Implicit Skills: Multiple-Choice Quizzes

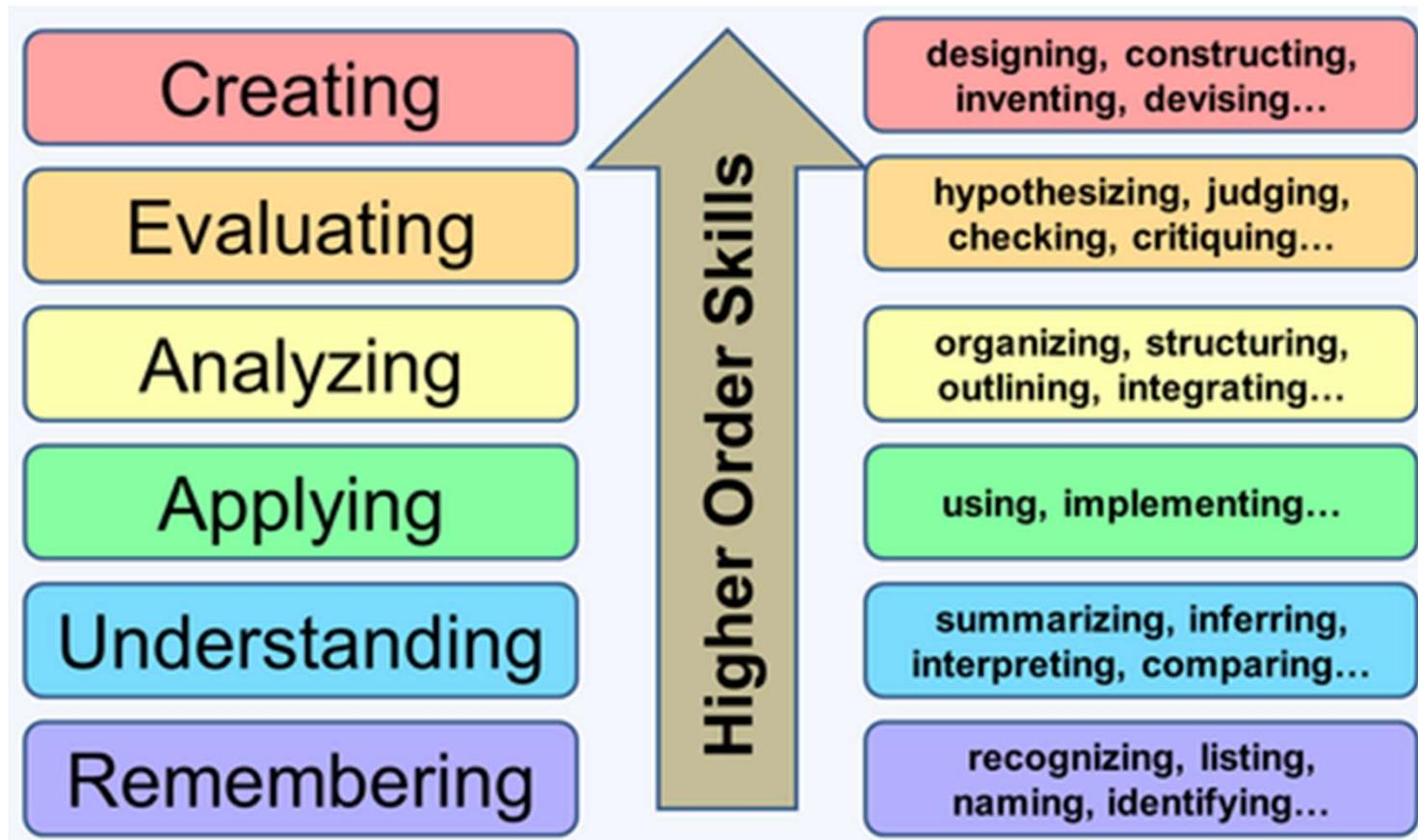
Taking multiple choice tests is an actual skill set; one that many students have not mastered. Multiple-choice quizzes implicitly assess:

- The ability to remember details
 - Mastery of English
 - Stress response
 - Reading skills
 - Attentional skills
 - Knowledge of test taking strategies (cluing into key words and qualifiers, attention to umbrella responses, not selecting the first answer that looks correct, eliminating questions that you know are wrong, etc.)
-

Students who know how to “test well” have a huge advantage over those who don’t - **this doesn’t mean that they know the material!**

In fact, multiple choice tests are biased against deep thinkers and students who can approach questions from multiple different angles.

Bloom's Taxonomy



Multiple Choice Quizzes

Have the unique distinction of being both lower on Bloom's Taxonomy (they can only assess lower order thinking - remembering and maybe understanding) while simultaneously assessing implicit skill sets that aren't assessed.

Somehow, they can be too easy and too hard at once.

Problematic Multiple Choice Questions

The following question is pulled from the text exam for one of my current classes:

You are a teacher in a classroom and want to document a child's developmental milestone. Which type of observation recording method would be most useful in this situation?

- a. running record
 - b. anecdotal record
 - c. time sample
 - d. audio recording
-

Problematic Multiple Choice Questions

I can make a case for each of the previous answers being correct. Because I am a good test taker, I would not have difficulty. Not all of my students would have that luxury; and the ones who are also gifted test takers may be able to answer this without knowing the material.

Instead, I could craft the quiz with brief samples of each type of observation and have students match the definition to the description, have them fill in the blank with a definition of the type of assessment, or have them watch a video in class and actually do an observation.

What all of this means in practice...

1) When possible, I allow for multiple avenues of summative assessment.

For students with limited means, this sometimes looks like options of how they turn things in.

- digital vs. hard copy, typed vs. handwritten

For students who are worried about their grasp on the material, this may be the option to turn things in early for ungraded general feedback.

- Every one of my international students takes advantage of this, due to their concerns about English proficiency.

For students with learning barriers, this is occasionally an option to submit an assessment in a different modality.

- I don't need to know they're expert writers to assess what kind of preschool teachers they can be, or the course SLOs.
-

2) I try to incorporate formative assessment into as many class sessions as possible.

This gives me a sense if I can accelerate the pace at which the class is going, or if I need to slow it down.

I had a small group of students that were not grasping material that the rest of the class had mostly mastered. In a bcc email, I sent those students additional resources, including an online module from the text, and invited them to office hours to discuss their difficulties - before the summative assessment was due.

When there's a huge discrepancy between what I know a student can do via formative assessment and what they submit via summative, it tells me that I need to slow down and examine the cause of the gap. Is my quiz fair? Are my assignment guidelines clear? Are they struggling in other ways that could use a referral?

3) I try to ensure that my assessment measures what it says it is going to measure.

Not ability to decode instructions.

Not technical writing skills.

Not fluency in the dominant culture.

Not knowledge of how to take a test.



No one wants to waste their time doing or grading meaningless assignments: make them worth your while.

in closing, an early childhood quote :)

“We often assume that students know things, or know them in particular ways, when they do not. We ask kindergarteners, ‘what is the sound of the letter at the end of the word?,’ forgetting that many of them are unclear about the concepts *letter*, *word*, *sound* (as it applies to speech), and *end* (which requires knowing that letters are ordered left to right), and do not know that letters bear a complex relationship to speech sounds.”

“The better you know something, the more risk there is of behaving egocentrically in relation to your knowledge. Thus, the greater the gap between teacher and learner, the harder teaching becomes.” -Peter Johnston, *Choice Words*