Designing Assessment Backward To Move It Forward

2017 Assessment Institute in Indianapolis
A Featured Speaker Session – Track 14A(AM)

Tuesday 24 October 2017 – 8:15 to 9:15 AM

Tom Angelo
Executive Director, CIphER
Center for Innovative Pharmacy Education & Research
Clinical Professor of Educational Innovation & Research
UNC Eshelman School of Pharmacy
UNC Chapel Hill
A DISCLAIMER

The Four ‘Not’s’

If I say *anything* that seems remotely critical, remember that my comments are absolutely:

**NOT** about the institution that employs you;

**NOT** about any institutions *you attended*;

**NOT** about any institutions *your children or other family members attend/attended*; and

**NOT** about *you!*
Here’s what the future looked like to Assessyphus
The future . . . as seen by Assessyphus

Accreditation Visit
(New Provost #1)

Business as Usual

Re-Accreditation Visit
(New Provost #2)

Business as Usual

Re-Accreditation Visit
(New President and
new Provost #3)

Business as Usual
The good news is that, in 2017, higher ed. assessment has:

- Powerful assessment tools (NSSE, VALUE rubrics)
- Ubiquitous enabling technologies (LMS, dashboards, etc.)
- Widely adapted frameworks (DQP)
- Supportive networks (AALHE)
- Centers of expertise (NILOA)
- Scholarly & practical resources
The *less* good news . . .
There are still relatively few institutions that have proven able to use assessment to:

1. Clearly define their learning outcomes (LOs);
2. Set transparent standards for assessing those LOs;
3. Demonstrably improve those LOs and/or;
4. Sustain those efforts over time.
Today, more than 33% of all US adults (25+) have at least a 4-year degree.

About 42% have at least a 2-year degree.

Have those gains in degree attainment led to a more civil, equitable, sustainable and just American society?

What kinds of learning outcomes did those graduates achieve?
Transformative learning . . .

Results in greater self-awareness, explicit understanding, justification and openness to challenge regarding our own implicit biases and everyday habits of mind – and deeper empathy for those of others.
Transformative learning . . .

Requires high-levels of skill in metacognition and reflection, and the ongoing motivation to engage in them.
Metacognition involves . . .

• Self-Awareness
  Knowing that and when you are thinking

• Self-Monitoring
  Noticing the quality/intensity of your thinking

• Self-Regulation & Self-Assessment
  Directing/Correcting your thinking

Reflection requires metacognition, but goes beyond it to affect/change values, beliefs, actions and/or habits
If we aspire to cause transformative learning, we have to be willing to change habits of heart, hand and mind . . . and to accept the inevitability of resistance and even conflict.
“A well-designed program is a clever learning trap, from which students cannot escape without demonstrating they have mastered the intended learning outcomes at the required high standards.”

T.A.
Some questions to consider . . .

If you wanted to construct a solid, functional **building**, would you start by:

1. Buying lots of concrete, steel & glass?
2. Buying lots of heavy equipment & tools?
3. Hiring lots of workers?
4. Building the easy bits first?
5. Designing and building each room independently of the others?
6. Developing a highly detailed overall design of the finished building you need?
And some related questions . . .

If you wanted to construct a solid, functional assessment program, would you start by:

1. Collecting lots of data?
2. Buying lots of technology & tests?
3. Hiring lots of data analysts?
4. Assessing the easy stuff?
5. Assessing each course/program in isolation?
6. Developing a highly detailed design of the overall assessment program you need?
“You can’t fix by analysis what you bungled by design.”

Perhaps shifting our focus from means to ends – and employing backward design and design thinking principles – might help us promote transformative, and not just additive change?
Seven Transformative Guidelines

1. Design backward and work forward
2. Build shared trust
3. Build shared language and concepts
4. Build shared goals and motivations
5. Re-engineer systems first, then change people
6. Take a scholarly approach at every step
7. Don’t assume, ask (assess & evaluate)
Options for Transformation

1. **Design backward and work forward**
Designing Assessment Backward

Suppose we began by asking:

1. Who might actually use feedback from this assessment?
2. Why would they use it?
3. How might they use it?
4. How do we know?
Options for Transformation

2. Build shared trust

• A shared ‘transformative learning experience’ for all faculty, academic staff and administrators [e.g., The 3-Day Workshop]

• A transformational “boot camp” for all incoming students – teamwork, study skills, reflection, etc.

• Values affirmation exercises
Values Affirmation Exercise

What educational/professional/personal values motivate you to invest time and energy in assessment efforts?

________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________
Which value(s) did you mention?

A. Improving your institution
B. Advancing your career
C. Improving students’ learning
D. Collaborating with others
E. Promoting equity
F. Saving the nation
G. When’s the break?
Interested in learning more about Building shared trust?

- Steele, C.M. (2010). Whistling Vivaldi . . .
Options for Transformation

3. Build shared language and concepts

• Assessing prior knowledge of key terms, such as learning outcomes, standards, etc.

• Teach students common, powerful learning and study strategies, such as “Blooming”
Categorizing Questions by Bloom’s Taxonomy Levels (Blooming)

By systematically varying the elements of the task, we can better assess and promote transfer and deep learning.
Bloom’s Taxonomy (revised)
Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001
Interested in learning more about Building shared language and concepts?

- Cook, Kennedy & McGuire (2013) on “Blooming”
- Dunlosky, J., et al. (2013) on effective learning techniques
- Myer & Land (2003) on “threshold concepts”
“It’s not what we do, but what students do that’s the important thing.”

Options for Transformation

4. Build shared goals and motivations

• Triangulate assessment on goals and expectations re: liberal learning outcomes involving employers, academics, partners, alumni, and students

• Goal-setting exercises with 1\textsuperscript{st} and 4\textsuperscript{th} year students
Interested in learning more about

**Building shared goals & motivations?**

- Morisano, et al. (2010). …personal goals…
Options for Transformation

5. Re-engineer systems first, then change people

- Review grading standards and rubrics to ensure that they recognize and reward transformational learning

- Review RTP policies and process to ensure that the assessment, evaluation, design and development, and related change management and leadership required is fairly recognized, evaluated, and rewarded

- Create robust professional development opportunities to support faculty engaged in transformational change [e.g., Professional Certificates]
It’s time for the “MF” word . . .

Meaningful FEEDBACK
“From the student’s point of view, your feedback is the instruction.”

Anonymous
Options for Transformation

6. *Take a scholarly approach*

- Involve librarians early and throughout
- Offer contestable funding for well-designed, research-informed transformation-focused projects
- Create mentored opportunities for students to engage in educational transformation projects alongside faculty
  [e.g., Harvard’s *Seminars on Assessment*]
Options for Transformation

7. Don’t assume, ask

• Treat the curriculum as an ongoing quasi-experiment
Options for Transformation

7. Don’t assume, ask

Let’s revisit the Applications Card.
Applications Card

Ideas/Techniques          Possible Applications
What the Future **Could** Look Like

Re-Accreditation

Meaningful Improvement

Re-Accreditation

Meaningful Improvement

Re-Accreditation

Meaningful Improvement

Re-Accreditation
Please complete the session evaluation form.

Thanks for your attention and participation
Designing Assessment Backward
To Move It Forward

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Executive Director, Center for Innovative Pharmacy Education & Research - CIPhER
UNC Eshelman School of Pharmacy – University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
tom_angelo@unc.edu

A FEW USEFUL REFERENCES ON ASSESSMENT, BACKWARD DESIGN & LEARNING


Dunlosky, J., et al. (2013). Improving students’ learning with effective learning techniques: Promising directions from cognitive and educational psychology. Psychological Science in the Public Interest, 14(1), 4-58.


A Few Useful References – continued


