Practicing What I Preach: Flipping for Mastery Learning in Assessment

I teach a classroom assessment course that all undergraduate teacher education majors are required to take. As a core requirement, the students in the class are diverse in majors (Elementary Education, Special Education, Music Education, Middle Grades, Secondary, etc) and in program experience (some in their sophomore year, others in the last semester before student teaching). As part of this class, I emphasize a mastery learning approach where students are assisted in mastering each learning target before advancing to a more advanced target (Bloom, 1971; 1976). In our first class, I introduce my students to the concept during the discussion of the syllabus. In subsequent classes, we have several classroom discussions about the concept after students read articles and book chapters on learning targets and mastery learning. However, I find that students are better able to formulate an opinion about whether or not this concept will work for them as future teachers by actually experiencing it themselves. Therefore, from reading quizzes to major group projects, I plan experiences for my students to engage in mastery learning firsthand. I have found that using a flipped classroom is the most effective way to implement mastery learning. More specifically, I utilize a flipped classroom format to implement a cyclic process of stepped assignments, formative assessment, and high-quality corrective instruction (Bloom, 1984; Guskey, 2010).

As an example of this cyclic process, the first major project students work on is a performance assessment designed to develop the skills necessary for translating state standard course of study goals and objectives into appropriate assessment activities for evaluating student learning. The instructions, templates, and rubrics for this multi-stepped assignment are posted to the online classroom management program (CMP). Students are expected to read the assignment documents outside of class and formulate questions to ask the instructor at the next class. After briefly reviewing the assignment and answering students’ questions, the instructor prompts students to begin work on the first part of the assignment in self-assigned groups during class. During this time, students are able to ask questions of each other and the teacher regarding resources and clarification of expectations for the assignment. Students complete the first part of the assignment during and/or after class and post their final work to the CMP by the next day. Before the next class, within the CMP, I use the rubric given to students as a formative assessment to inform students on their learning progress with the first part of the assignment. In addition, I provide specific electronic feedback for students in the form of comments on their project work, also posted to the CMP. During the following class period, the results of the formative assessment direct what students focus on. Students with few or no revisions, start work on the next part of the assignment. Students with several revisions, use teacher feedback to make changes with the added benefit of being able to ask the instructor specific follow up questions. Students with numerous revisions meet with the instructor for small group high-quality corrective instruction (not re-teaching). For example, on part one of the assignment, students are required to identify appropriate curricular standards for the creation of a content based assessment and a performance based assessment. Students delineate the standards into learning targets classified into categories based on readings from class. Often times, high-quality corrective instruction for this part of the assignment includes connecting the classifications of learning targets to the revised Bloom’s Taxonomy (Anderson, et al., 2001), which students learned about in a previous course. All students submit revisions
to the CMP for another round of formative assessment and feedback from the instructor. Since each part of the assignment builds on previous parts, subsequent parts of the assignment cannot be attempted until the previous part has been successfully completed. This cycle continues until students have effectively concluded all parts of the assignment. Students have a finite amount of time to successfully complete each part to guarantee that the class moves forward at approximately the same time.

Naturally, this approach calls for a great deal of consistent work on the part of the professor. However, by breaking the assignment into parts, I found that this process actually took less time in the long run versus having students complete all parts of the assignment before receiving feedback. Even more important, is the response from the students. Student course evaluations revealed an overwhelmingly positive response. Specifically, students stated the mastery learning method alleviated stress throughout the semester, facilitated question-asking and inquiry with both classmates and the professor, and enabled them to focus on learning the material rather than their grade as an outcome.

References


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