

Formative Assessments: Creating ITA-Undergraduate Partnerships

“You don’t teach a class, you teach a student.”

Ken Bain in *What the Best College Teachers Do* quoting Paul Baker

You teach the student that you have.

Versant Tests

Scored (20)-(80)

Passing: Overall (65) with Pronunciation (55)
SPEAK equivalent about (50)

Microteaching Test Overall (55)-(64)
SPEAK equivalent about (45)

Needs Assessment adapted from Vella (2002)

- 1.) Why are you taking this class?
- 2.) What do you hope to have accomplished by the end of this class?
- 3.) What do you do well?
- 4.) What are your areas of greatest need?
- 5.) What are your concerns/ fears?

Purpose of the Needs Assessment:

- 1.) Promotes learning as dialogue.
- 2.) Gives the teacher information about the students.
- 3.) Demonstrates an activity that can be used in the ITAs own teaching.
- 4.) Bridges to a discussion of philosophy of teaching.

Learning Picture inspired by Brown (2005)

Warm up: ITAs and undergrads write analogies: “Learning is like...”

In small groups, ITAs and undergrads answer the question, “What is learning?” by drawing a group-defined picture. An ITA spokesperson from each group explains their picture to the class.

Purpose:

- 1.) Builds Rapport within the class, especially with the undergraduate mentors.
- 2.) Language warm-up: talking about abstract concepts.
- 3.) Bridges to a discussion of philosophy of teaching.

Getting Feedback from Your Students

Minute Papers: Bang for the Buck

Wilson (1986)

Method: 4-5 times a semester wrote 2 questions on the board before class. At the then of class students write their name on a piece of paper, answer the questions and turn in their responses.

- 1.) What is the most significant thing you learned today?
- 2.) What question is uppermost on your mind at the end of this class session?

Benefits:

- 1.) Provides feedback on student understanding.
- 2.) Requires more active listening from students.
- 3.) Helps identify students who need help or lack background.
- 4.) Improves student writing: responses at the end of the semester are longer and more articulate than at the beginning.
- 5.) Helps document to the students that they are indeed learning something in the course.

WHAT CAN WE DO TO IMPROVE YOUR LEARNING IN THIS CLASS?

- 1.) Uses inclusive language; emphasizes that learning is a group effort.
- 2.) Focuses on learning, not the students likes and dislikes.
- 3.) Quick and Anonymous.

What kind of responses do ITAs get when they ask this in their own classes?

- 1.) You're doing a great job!
- 2.) Helpful suggestions: e.g. talk louder; don't talk so fast.
- 3.) Suggestions that need to be unpacked: e.g. go over the assignments in more detail; review previous assignments in the class; pass around an attendance sheet to give students credit for showing up to the discussion.
- 4.) Unrealistic suggestions: e.g. go over the problems for the quiz before you give the quiz.
- 5.) Things the TA has no control over: e.g. dissatisfaction with the lecture, course materials, pace, class time or organization of the course.

Conclusion

Using formative/ classroom assessments with ITAs opens the door for ITA trainers to improve not only the quality of the ITAs teaching, but also the quality of the instruction we give them.

References

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Also: University of Virginia *Teaching Concerns* online publication
http://trc.virginia.edu/Publications/Teaching_Concerns/Teaching_Concerns.htm