The Art of Meaningful Assessment: From Choice Boards to AI-Drive Dialogues

SPEAKERS
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Tierney King 00:01
This is the Faculty Focus Live podcast sponsored by the Teaching Professor. I'm your host, Tierney king, and I'm here to bring you inspiration, energy and creative strategies that you can utilize in your everyday teaching. Today, we're going to explore innovative assessment strategies that enhance student learning. We'll talk about reflection and how to use feedback as a tool for growth and knowledge, and then we'll talk about asynchronous online teaching assessments, such as a weekly choice board or brochure. Finally, we'll talk about the integration of generative AI and assessment practices. So whether you teach in-person or online, these ideas offer new ways to reveal student understanding and better connect complex ideas for your students. To start, Nichole Barta will talk about how you can empower your students to refine their performance with assessment strategies in her program, How Can I Use Assessment Data to Provide Meaningful Feedback and Deeper Learning?

Nichole Barta 01:01
Now let's start with reflection, and I'd like you to ask yourself: How many times have I graded assignments, left comments and then wondered if my students actually took the time to read them? And reflecting on my teaching practices, I've often found myself in the situation, assigning grades and making numerous comments on each assignment, yet not sure if students use them constructively. This approach, I now realize, is more about relaying information, not providing feedback. Feedback is about growth. It's about identifying the gap between current performance and the desired standard. Then we must guide students on how to bridge that gap to enhance their future performance. Meaningful feedback goes beyond assigning a grade or making comments on an assignment. It is a dynamic process involving a cycle of reflection, adjustment and iteration, fostering knowledge development and improving self regulation skills. Our main goal should be to use feedback as a teaching tool to enhance student learning and performance rather than justifying grades. Using this approach not only empower students to refine their performance and learning strategies effectively, but also fosters the development of lifelong learning skills. In courses that predominantly focus on knowledge recall and using exams for summative assessments, it is important to reflect on how frequently students practice recalling information. Consider, do I have data indicating students comprehension levels before the final assessment? Have I identified concepts students find challenging before the final exam? If such data is lacking, it is unlikely that students are receiving meaningful feedback. This underscores the need for opportunities to assess their understanding before summative exams. For these courses, a practical formative assessment strategy is to use many quizzes across

several weeks to check for understanding, a method known as retrieval practice. Retrieval practice is an evidence-based learning strategy that involves recalling information from memory, thereby strengthening neural pathways and enhancing long term learning. It's not merely a measurement of one's memory, but a powerful tool to solidify learning and identify gaps in knowledge. Now, let's move on to courses that emphasize application synthesis and the creation of products, and use summative assessments like comprehensive written essays. It's important to reflect on how many opportunities students have to revise and resubmit their work. Ask yourself, Are students given sufficient time and feedback to address misconceptions and enhance their work? Have you identified areas where students might require additional support before the final submission? Ensuring our students produce their best work isn't simply about focusing on the final submission, it's closely linked to our consistent effort to provide ongoing impactful feedback throughout their learning process. Therefore, incorporating chances for improvement and identifying areas that need additional support is essential in helping them produce their highest quality of work.

Tierney King 03:55
You don't have to be face-to-face to implement assessment strategies. There are also numerous effective assessments for online courses, from reflections to stop and jots to a resource analysis. In this program, Desireé Caldwell explains how she uses assessments in her asynchronous courses.

Desireé Caldwell 04:13
An example of a formative assessment that provides autonomy to students is a weekly choice board discussion. In our courses, discussions are due on Thursday with peer responses due on Sunday. Each week, students pick one of the nine options from the choice board to complete. The choice board includes options that encompass before, during and after reading or viewing strategies. A few examples of choices from the board include Stop and Jot, Resource Analysis, and Your Reflections. In the Stop and Jot choice, it says, "While you are reading this week's readings, and watching this week's videos, jot down any notes or ideas that spark your thinking. You can do this on sticky notes or in a notebook, and submit a photo of your notes." I absolutely love seeing students handwritten notes. So this is one of my favorite choices. The Resource Analysis choice says, "After each chapter, reading, and video resource for this week, write down two takeaways. A takeaway can consist of the following: What did you learn? What aha moments did you have? Or how do you think this can help you as an educator? Be sure each takeaway is labeled with the corresponding resource." In the Your Reflections choice, it says, "Provide a thorough response to each of the following prompts. Identify what has challenged you when reading or viewing this resource. Identify what has been reaffirmed and identify what you will do moving forward." Another summative assessment strategy we use to promote real-world applicability is the creation of teaching guides or brochures or handouts for distribution. For example, after learning about the importance of using evidence-based best practices in a special education classroom, students are tasked with creating an educational brochure on this topic to be distributed to preK-12 special education teachers in their local school districts. The final product can be created for either digital or physical distribution. Self assessment is a key tool for teachers. To help students get into this habit, we have students self assess in the area of APA format at the beginning and at the end of every course. It includes five statements on which students rate themselves as always, sometimes or never. One statement says, "I know when to use the APA format in my coursework." Another statement says, "I know how to properly format in text citations in my discussions and assignments." These same five

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questions are on the assessment at the end of the course. However, there is also a reflection piece that asks students to identify two specific areas of APA format in which they have improved. This self-assessment is helpful to the instructor in order to be able to provide individual instruction in this area.

Tierney King 07:43
Lastly, let's talk about AI and how we can use it to help assess student understanding. In this program, Jean Mandernach taps into the potential of AI to assess student learning in a new way.

Jean Mandernach 07:54
I really just want to get in brainstorming and thinking about how can you tap into the potential of AI to assess student learning in a completely different way. And one that is not reliant on student's written communication. So the first idea is just a problem solving dialogue. And this really does rest on conversational analysis. In an ideal world, imagine if you could just sit down with your students and say, "I'm going to give you this problem. Let's talk about it. I want you to share your ideas. I want reflect on those ideas. I'm going to ask questions. I'm going to follow up with other ideas. And I just want to go back and forth. And I want to see if you understand the material." Now if we don't have very many students, we could actually just do that, and oral assessments are not new. In a small enough class, and in the right environment, we can do an oral assessment. AI lets us do this with larger classes. So now you can actually tell your students, I want you to go to whichever generative AI program it is that you prefer, Bing, ChatGPT, it doesn't really matter the AI program. And you could start students with the prompt and tell them I want you to interact, and you're going to start with this prompt. And it could be a problem, it could be a hypothetical situation, it could be a challenge that they're facing right now in your discipline. Tell students here's the question you're going to start with. And I just want you to interact and go back and forth. Now to set up that AI interaction, you're going to want to tell the generative AI what you're doing. So you would say, I want you to simulate and simulate a dialogue with this student that allows them to show their understanding to pivot, to interact, to answer questions, and to adjust in a conversational manner. Tell AI that and then pose the problem. Now when you're assigning this to students, you're simply going to give students that big prompt. And you're going to say here's the prompt that's going to set the stage for that generative AI program. And then here's the question that you're going to kick off the dialogue with. And then, rather than having students write about their experience, you can simply have them copy and paste the dialogue. Or if you're in ChatGPT, there's a little button that you can say share this chat, and they can submit the chat. And now you can look through and see were there questions? How did they respond? Were they accurate in their understanding? But you can assess the ongoing dialogue. Another idea is just using AI for concept mapping. Oftentimes in psychology, that's my discipline, I want to see if students understand how the different ideas and theories connect together. Historically, we've had them do a literature review. I ask them go out and get the literature, bring it together, organize it by themes, and write it up. Well, as we've already discussed, those that are good writers are probably going to do this task much more effectively than those that aren't. Concept mapping focuses on the same cognitive task. Can you bring all these different pieces of information together and organize them by themes so that you can see where are the gaps? Where are the trends? What is happening? So again, you can set up an AI prompt that says, ask me the questions to help assemble how we can see the trends and themes that are emerging. For the output, you could possibly have students submit the final concept map or you could even have them submit the dialogue, the prompts that they use, the themes that they enter, or even

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both. If you're looking for somewhere to start, a really good starting place is to go to AI yourself and say, I want to do an assignment where students utilize AI, so that I can assess their thinking, give me some ideas, let it know your discipline, tell it your student population. AI can really be a good brainstorming partner for you to think about how you can use AI in your own courses. When you're doing this though, the key things to keep in mind, those prompts are going to be fairly long, you want to be specific, you want to tell AI the purpose of what that assignment is doing how you want it to interact with students, the kinds of things that you want from it. The more detailed you can be, the better it's going to be. Remember, you're embracing the conversational nature of AI. It's not an oral test. This is about thinking and thinking evolves and it changes and it adapts and it pivots. And that's what we want to use AI for. To play devil's advocate to ask questions to pivot with them and adjust as they're demonstrating their thinking.

Tierney King 12:29
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