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Instructional Design: Evaluating Active Learning [1]

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This blog post is the final in a series about active learning course design.

- The first post provided an evidence-based perspective on how moving from a lecture paradigm design to an active learning design improves student learning.
- The second post offered design considerations and examples for incorporating active learning into the face-to-face classroom.
- The third post added design considerations and examples for active learning in the online classrooms

Thus, in this final post on active learning course design, let's consider the most important question of all, "How do you know?" How do you know that utilizing active learning strategies helped your learners achieve not only something, but they achieved something more?

The answers to this complicated question are:

What learning objective(s)/outcome(s) did the active learning strategies help to achieve?
How well did your learners achieve the aligned objective(s)/outcome(s)?

For example, a face-to-face course (or online course), has the following objective:

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to identify bias in professional opinions.

Formative active learning strategies designed to help students achieve this objective include:

- Think/Pair/Share the definition of bias
- Voting on which part(s) of selected articles demonstrated bias
- Small group discussion on if and how bias can be avoided

The summative assessment aligned with this outcome asked students to:

Find a professional opinion, identify examples of bias or explain how the author avoided bias

Active learning activities directly aligned to course objectives or outcomes provide an evaluative structure. One way to generate evaluative data is through the use of rubrics. Rubrics clearly define the specific criteria of what the assignment is designed to assess. Rubrics also allow for levels of performance to be identified, thus allowing student performance data to move from a yes/no model to a specific, graduated level of performance. Thus, rubrics have to potential to generate data on how well learners achieved the aligned objective or outcome.

Rubrics can be used for formative and summative evaluation. Reddy and Andrade (2010) reviewed available research regarding the use of rubrics in higher education. Their article provides data to consider when using a rubric for formative and summative evaluation.

Additionally, Wu, Heng, and Wang's (2015) article reviewed how rubrics can be used with case studies (an active learning strategy) to help students meet the associated learning outcomes. Their article focuses on how rubrics can improve the student learning experience.

Both articles are a great place to start when beginning to plan out the evaluation plan for your course.

Finally, as you test the active learning waters within your own class, make sure to begin with the end in mind. In other words, think about the data you can generate to illustrate how active learning strategies helped your learners meet course objectives/outcomes.

References

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