Beyond Memorization

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As co-chair of the JCCC Assessment Council, I volunteered to write an article about a session I attended recently at the Learning and The Brain Conference in San Francisco. I was in search of tools and methodology to improve my Learning Strategies courses, to provide more skills for our students, and to further my understanding of the learning process—no small feat for a single conference.

Assessment is a part of the learning in all classrooms. As faculty we see when students are engaged and we notice when students are utilizing the knowledge in the curriculum. But do we teach thinking? Do we model critical thinking skills? Can we incorporate these ideas into the classrooms?

The keynote speaker at the conference, Dr. Ron Ritchhart, researcher at Harvard’s School of Education, noted that content is available to our students freely. Students can access information from a Google search on mobile devices, and watch any video on Khan Academy or even a lecture on YouTube. So an important value of a college education is teaching students to manage their thought processes and extend learning beyond the text and lecture.

As faculty we must consider how deeply we expect our students to learn, and then design assignments, lessons and assessment to help students develop “habits of thinking and learning.” As the Understanding Map created by Harvard education researchers suggests, learning occurs when the learner does something with content (see figure below). Situated at the intersection of metacognitive skills and Bloom’s taxonomy, this map shows how to get beyond just memorization, and how to guide students to design work that scaffolds and organizes their understanding.

The map begins with describing “what’s there,” moves to innate curiosity with “wondering,” then promotes examination of other perspectives with “considers different viewpoints.” After that, the learner moves to “reason with evidence,” and subsequently through these phases: “making connections,” “uncovering complexity,” “forming conclusions.” Finally, the thinking process culminates in “building explanations.” In developing curriculum and designing class activities, assignments and assessments, I need to consider, “Which thinking skills am I guiding? Where are my goals on the Understanding Map?”

Assessment is a key part of our role as educators. We need to know how our students are learning, how they are grappling with course objectives, and how our teaching methodology can offer more than just facts. To navigate the academic and working worlds they will enter, students must have adaptive strategies (meta-strategies, if you will) to learn independently. Content is everywhere and readily available. By modeling metacognitive thought processes and structuring assignments that will expand and develop students’ thinking in this way, teachers provide essential tools that students can learn and draw from—for a lifetime.

www.pz.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/Understanding_map_circle.pdf
Sign Up Now!
August 15, 2016
(the Monday of Professional Development Days)
Get a jump-start on your assessment plans at this one-day workshop.
Register using CRN 30001 (Use Staff/Dev 2016-17 Term)

FINAL CALL!
Register now for the 6th Annual Regional Community College Assessment Conference
Assessment: Shifting from Compliance to Ownership
April 22, 2016

The conference will be held from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. on Friday, April 22, 2016, at Johnson County Community College.
The 2016 conference theme is Assessment: Shifting from Compliance to Ownership, which will be highlighted in the keynote address by Dr. Jillian Kinzie from NSSE and in breakout sessions throughout the day.
The cost of the conference is $85.00, but mini-grant funds are available to pay for the conference through the Office of Outcomes Assessment. Apply today – registrations are limited!

Quote of the Month
"Assessment should encompass a systemic view of student learning in terms of involving the entire educational community in assessment as a collaborative and collective effort around students and their learning. Learning is holistic, cumulative, and shaped by a myriad of experiences inside and outside the classroom.”

Check out this book today at the OOA resource library in GEB 262.

World Café
It is never too late to get started early!
Get started now on planning for a new academic year.
Sign up for a World Café table by calling the Office of Outcomes Assessment at ext. 7607.

The Practical Nursing Department had a focused session to reinvigorate its assessment planning.

Call the office today and choose a date/time – we’ll bring the brownies!