

Abstract: In this article, we tell the story of inquiring about, designing, implementing and studying our enactment of non-traditional assessment practices in/g6s TworTwor ofbeliefs and vWuadissuhowadforningd learning. our assessment practices affected issues of equity for our pre-service teachers, such as their participation, identity, power, and agency in our classes. We hope to inspire readers to reflect on how their assessment practices affect students' learning and sense of agency.

Key Words: assessment; teacher education; equity

The Back Story

In this article, we tell the story of inquiring about, designing, implementing and studying our enactment of non-traditional assessment practices in our elementary education university methods course. We organized this article using a theater playbill metaphor, starting with a prologue, followed by three acts and an intermission, and concluding with an epilogue. The first two authors were instructors for the methods courses discussed in the play and the third author was a graduate student who assisted with the literature review and the writing. In the play that follows, we tell the story of our journey toward better aligning our assessment practices with our beliefs and values about teaching and learning. First, we describe the conversation that sparked our journey. Next, in three acts, we

¹ readers to examine their own assessment practices, especially as experienced by their students. Ultimately, we also hope to invite a larger, more systemic conversation about the role that non-traditional assessment practices in teacher education programs might have on “moving educator preparation to excellence through continuous improvement and research-based

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. In the epilogue, we challenge

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transformation” (Retrieved from the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) on September 17, 2013 from <http://www.caep.org/standards.html>).

[curtain rises and Instructors speak]

The Prologue

Instructor 1: “You know that ‘What’s in *your* wallet?’ commercial? Well, lately I’ve been asking myself, ‘What’s in *my* syllabus?’ especially related to assessment. I am feeling quite hypocritical, claiming to value the processes of pre-service teachers making meaning and taking ownership of their learning.”

councils in English language arts and mathematics education have recently issued formal Position Statements on the value of formative assessment. Three important ideas from these statements guided us as we reformed our assessment practices. First, assessment that is formative must be informative to teachers, students, and families (National Council of Teachers of English, 2013). Second, formative assessment has a positive impact on student motivation and it supports students in actively monitoring their own learning. Finally, formative assessment results in higher achievement (The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, 2013). Additionally, Wiliam (2007, pp. 1-4) offered the following “five keys” to effective assessment for learning implementation that, as we will discuss later, provided a blue print for our journey in reforming our assessment practices.

1. Clarifying, sharing, and understanding goals for learning and criteria for success with learning;
2. Engineering effective classroom discussions, questions, activities, and tasks that elicit evidence of students’ learning;
3. Providing feedback that moves learning forward;
4. Activating students as owners of their own learning; and
5. Activating students as learning resources for one another.

Stiggins (2002) helped us distinguish between assessment *for* learning and assessment *of* learning. He purported that both are necessary, but currently only the latter is in place

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Letter grades cannot capture the complexity of the learner or the learning process; grades actually serve to undermine students' intrinsic motivations to learn; grades are often/typically used to rigidly denote students as "successful" or "unsuccessful"; and ... grades effectively exclude students from determining for themselves the value of their classroom experience(s) and the direction(s) of their own learning (McClam & Sevier, 2010, p. 1461).

They agreed with Kohn (1993) that striving for equity meant "bringing students into the evaluation process" (p. 209) in such a way that encourages the building of trust and relationships, attention to issues of identity (e.g., race, gender, class, etc.) (TJ 19.)-10(t)p. 1461mp m(g)10(r)4(nc)-6((y)20(t.

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student experience is more positive in modules where assessment for learning approaches are used and students are more likely to take a deep approach to learning” (p. 749).

ACT 2: Reforming our assessment practice

Informed by the literature, we moved to a plan of action. We set out to

Table 1

Assessment Rubric: Directions: Pre-service teachers must demonstrate at least Level 2 competency in each criterion to pass the assignment. Best work is expected on the first submission. Revision is required for work below Level 2 in any competency. Except in rare circumstances, no more than one revision will be permitted.

Competency/ Learning Target	Level 1 / Below Expectation	Level 2 / At Expectation	Level 3 / Exceeds Expectation
Disposition/ Tone	A strengths-based disposition/tone is not evident at all and/or the task is not grounded in the child's prior knowledge or experiences	A strengths-based disposition/tone is evident at times and/or the task is not well grounded in the child's prior knowledge or experiences	Disposition/tone is strengths-based throughout and/or the task is well grounded in the child's prior knowledge or experiences
Connection to Research	Very few, if any, connections to research exist	Connections to research exist; most fit the context	Many connections to research exist; all fit the context
Observation & Analysis	Little observation/evidence exists	Observation/evidence exists; more description is needed. Some analysis exists (quantity); however, more depth (quality) is needed	Descriptive observation/evidence and analysis exist. Analysis is pervasive (quantity) thorough and deep (quality)
Content Knowledge	Misconceptions with content and/or vocabulary exist or content knowledge is not clearly articulated	No misconceptions with content and/or vocabulary exist; some areas need more clarity and/or precision	Content knowledge is clear and precise; complex understanding is evident
Pedagogical Knowledge	Pedagogy is teacher-directed and/or teacher-centered and/or teaching ideas are lacking and/or are too vague to be assessed		

Because our institution requires that a final grade be submitted to the Registrar for the pre-service teacher's transcript, we needed to find a way to translate each pre-service teacher's work and journey into a traditional grade of A, B, C, D or F. At the end of the semester, we decided we would meet with each pre-service teacher for fifteen to twenty minutes to accomplish the task of deciding on a final grade. We called these meetings exit conferences. During these exit conferences, the instructors and the pre-service teacher would review and discuss the pre-service teacher's work holistically and from multiple data points. Our goal was to determine a fair grade that would capture the essence of his/her work over the semester and that would be valid and reliable. Key data points that we thought we should collaboratively consider were: competency ratings for all assignments, including first submissions as well as revisions to enable noticing trends in the ratings as viewed chronologically over time; trends on how "best" or "revised" work compared to ratings on first submissions; attendance/punctuality; class participation—both in person and online; collaboration and engagement; and field work preparation. As we considered ratings, we did engage in some number crunching by calculating mean averages for each assignment submission and for each competency completed during the semester. Those mean averages assisted both the instructors and the pre-service teacher in making sense of and discussing the learning trends that emerged. The averages also helped when considering how the work and engagement of the pre-service teacher fared with regard to the following School of Education letter grade descriptors:

- A Extraordinarily high achievement; shows unusually complete command of the subject matter; represents an exceptionally high degree of originality and creativity.
- A- Exceptionally thorough knowledge of the subject matter; outstanding performance, showing strong analytical abilities.
- B+ Significantly above average understanding of material and quality of work.
- B Very good, solid, above average understanding of material and quality of work.
- B- Good, acceptable performance.
- C+ Satisfactory quality of work.
- C Minimally acceptable quality of work.
- C- to F Unacceptable work. Not meeting requirement for certification in the School of Education.

To better prepare the pre-service teachers for this collaborative process, we developed a learning activity that simulated an exit conf-6(s) 0 Tc(p)-4(15 Td [(def4 Tc Td (B)Tj 0.6n

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conversation about the degree to which their course work and engagement demonstrated their competency in the learning targets and how we might collaboratively identify the letter grade that most accurately and fairly represented the work of the pre-service teacher throughout the semester. This process of designing and simulating an exit conference, we believed, supported us in building trust with the pre-service teachers and in paying closer attention to issues of their identity, power, voice, and agency in our methods class. We felt that we were joining with them in more of a coaching role, instead of towering above them in an authoritative, evaluative role. Now, we pause before we continue the story of how we listened to and studied the pre-service teachers' experiences with the assessment redesign.

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inquiry-based pedagogy, scholarly writing, critical reflection & collaboration). We also offered all of the pre-service teachers an opportunity to more formally participate in our action research study by meeting with us in small groups for interviews after the course was completed. Nine pre-service teachers decided to participate. During these interviews, we asked them to write and then talk with us about the following questions:

1. In this methods class, you completed some assignments in trios. Describe your thoughts and feelings/emotions (at beginning of semester, in middle of semester and at end of semester) about this idea.
2. In this methods class, you negotiated a final grade with the instructors without using a traditional point and percentage system. We looked holistically at your progress toward demonstrating certain competencies (disposition/tone, observation and analysis, connection to research, content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and writing). Describe your thoughts and feelings/emotions (at beginning of semester, in middle of semester and at end of semester) about this idea.
3. In this methods class, we studied and utilized ‘assessment for learning’ (as opposed to ‘assessment of learning’). Describe your thoughts and feelings/emotions (at beginning of semester, in middle of semester and at end of semester) about this idea.

Twenty-nine of the fifty-eight pre-service teachers responded to the online survey and nine were willing to engage in interviews. The following served as data for our study:

- x Interviews and journal entries from nine pre-service teachers about their thoughts at the beginning of the methods course
- x Interviews and journal entries from nine pre-service teachers about their thoughts in the middle of the methods course
- x Interviews and journal entries from nine pre-service teachers about their thoughts at the end of the methods course
- x Online survey data from twenty-nine pre-service teachers

Most of our data was qualitative in nature, although some of the survey questions yielded a bit of quantitative data. Overall, we found that twenty-three of the twenty-nine pre-service teachers who responded to the survey preferred feedback only. Four preferred grades and feedback, and only 2 preferred only grades. Examples of the reasons expressed by those who indicated that they preferred feedback only were:

“I prefer this method because it helps me be more intrinsically motivated to learn and the rubric is broken into specific parts, making my strengths and weaknesses clear, rather than just receiving a grade.”

Table 3

Beginning of Semester Frequency Table

Themes	Emotions	Tallies	Frequency (out of 16 total data points in 'Beginning' data set)
Grade Focused Grade Focused	<i>Apprehensive</i> <i>Discomfort</i>	3	

personal identity; shifts in beliefs about assessment and motivation; and notions of personal and professional growth.

Some of the powerful statements about shifts in identity, motivation, and agency recorded in pre-service teachers' journals at the end of the course can be found in Table 4.

Table 4

Journal Entries from End of the Course Data Set

“Assessment for learning was interesting to me because it allowed me to take ownership of my learning. [This class] was one of the only classes at [the university] where I have actually been able to implement my learning in real life examples.One thing that I did not like about assessment for learning was the way you could not determine your grade throughout the semester. It was hard to figure out how the final grade was going to work because their *[sic]* was *[sic]* no “grades” for the assignments.”

“I felt a closer relationship with my instructors because it took the pressure off of me being focused on getting a good grade. I always felt supported as a learner throughout the whole semester because my learning and growing was of most importance. My instructors would continuously work with me until I fully understood the material. I loved assessment for learning and I will use it in my classroom at times when I am a teacher....My opinions, values, and beliefs were always respected and I had my own identity.... There were clear high expectations the whole semester, which I loved. All of the feedback that I received was beneficial and it supported me extremely in improving myself....The only thing that made me nervous throughout the semester on assessment for learning was not feeling confident in what I did.”

revolved around how we would help the students understand and transition to this form of assessment and how we would be able to justify the grade if and when a student appealed the grade. Despite these concerns, no one directly forbade us to move forward with our plan. Following our first semester of implementing the learning for assessment practices described in this article, we presented our very early research and initial results informally to our faculty at a ‘brown bag’ discussion, using a story-telling format called Readers Theatre. We included six of the nine (all were invited and six were able to attend) pre-service teachers who participated in interview and journaling in that presentation to allow our faculty to hear both instructor and student voices. In this way, we sought feedback from other faculty members and we involved the pre-service teachers themselves in the reform movement. This ‘brown bag’ presentation was met with more positive than negative responses and it generated a great deal of interest in our assessment redesign work. We then presented this work at two National Assessment Institutes to share our findings and gather feedback from other university instructors. Currently, a few of our colleagues use assessment for learning in their courses; however, a substantial number remain grounded in traditional university assessment practices, including grading with points and percentages.

Since completing this study, we have continued to use assessment for learning in our pre-service methods courses. We have modified our competency-based rubric several times to better reflect expected learning outcomes. We have also instituted instructional conversations around each of the learning targets to help pre-service teachers better understand those learning goals. So far, none of the pre-service teachers in our courses have appealed the final grade they earned in the course. We are committed to an on-going review of our assessment practices and their impact on our pre-service teachers. We hope to inspire readers of this article to ask themselves this, “What’s in my syllabus and how do my assessment practices affect my students?”

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