

Authentic Assessment in Directing and Cinema class.

By Steve Jackson, Fall, 2008

The directing class is a unique educational experience for students. Students in the class are presented a real world setting that closely simulates the experiences they will face on graduate. The course uses active learning, small team integration, service learning, authentic assessment, and a unique professor / student relationship to produce a learning environment that allows students to integrate the knowledge they have gained from previous classes into a single senior level working experience. It also acts as a catch for students whose knowledge and skills may be imperfect, and allows them to learn from their fellow students.

The main course experience revolves around a real-world production environment where a small team of students, lead by a student leader, working on a video production that the students have significant say in its progress and completion. The National Academy of Science says that this learning, which they call authentic experience learning, happens when, “teachers focus inquiry predominately on real phenomena (or in our case, production experiences)...where students are given investigations or guided toward fashioning investigations that are demanding but within their capabilities” (cited in Daniels & Bizar, 1998, p. 171)

The result is that assessment cannot be by simple rubric (where students succeed if they do X) or testing (where students return information on subject Y in the order and manner called on by the professor). Instead, the course judges student performance

based on “intellectual accomplishments that are worthwhile, significant, and meaningful” (Wehlage, Newmann, & Secada, 1996, p. 23). In Directing class this is measured using a four element scale:

1) A formative employee performance review carried out three times during the term based on actual industry review systems used in large corporations.

2) A media review that looks objectively at the proposed product and the final product produced during the class to determine if the final product meets required industry standards. This review is also completed at intermediate stages in the process to provide feed back and course correction for students.

3) Weekly short interactions where the week's work effort is quantitatively measured against a metric of how much needed to be accomplished to meet project goals.

4) A skills assessment that asks the question: did the student learn their basic skills. This is usually only performed once to determine if skill remediation is needed this late in the game.

Authentic assessment is carried out by using industry standard corporate media assessment instruments that measure worker effort and progress. These assessments are formative in nature, meaning that they do not result in a grade at first offering. Instead, students are directed on how to make changes to their work progress, what

skills they have to acquire moving forward, and what information they are missing. They are also informed what they are doing right, what information they have that is useful and effective, and the positive aspects of their performance. Students then reply with a letter outlining their plans for improvement. When students meet the requirements of this plan of improvement, their evaluations are passed to the professor who changes the formative reviews into a summative grade. In all cases, the students are not penalized for problems at the start of the process, but are rewarded for their work to fix problems that are found by having their record cleaned up.

The production process offers some distinct learning advantages for the dedicated student. Learning outcomes in classes that use these formats are very high. This is because students are not only under the watchful eye of the professor, but are being monitored by a student producer. The chance the student can “slip through the cracks” is limited. The process of active learning assures strong retention of skills and theories, because as they are applied they are moved from short term memory to long term memory, the process being reinforced by practical use of the theories and skills.

Difficulties in the Process

The main difficulties in the process are, 1) student fear of active learning environments based on overexposure to lecture courses and their rigid grading environments, 2) fear of innovative teaching techniques by faculty and administration, because of the possibility of students complaints by students who are scared of the real world contexts of the class, 3) the very real (although relatively rare) chance of student group failure and the resulting failure to produce client product, and 4) the

elevated time requirements on the part of faculty to provide for innovative educational experience. In each case, these objectives can be overcome by communication and education of different publics. Students, for example, need to be constantly made aware that authentic experience classes are formative and informational, and the grade they receive is completely in their power to change. Fear of innovative teaching is another example of a disability classes such as Directing face. It is rarely possible to make every student in a class happy with not following the usual lecture and test format. The results often are single student complaints that when responded to incorrectly can result in the entire class being shut down, ruining the educational experience for many students. The faculty member who teaches using authentic assessment, active learning, and service learning must communicate to supervisors early and often the innovative nature of the class, and seek out ways to impress on them the effectiveness of the methods.

Bibliography

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