It’s Blog Assessment Time and Related Items

Mary E. Yakimowski
Director of Assessment

Over the last few editions, we have talked about enhancing our assessment culture at the Neag School. Recently, I was scanning emails from a listserv to which I belong. The folks were sharing “blogs” being developed on assessment. Being curious, I surfed these blogs. I came on one blog, developed by Gavin Henning, that shared a story that captured assessment culture as a state of mind. The excerpt from this blog is produced for you in this brief. It is quite interesting and I hope you enjoy it.

Assessment Culture: It’s a State of Mind

Gavin Henning
Director of Student Affairs Planning, Evaluation, and Research at Dartmouth College

[This is verbatim from the blog.]

Last night I was attending a presentation on the SAT test and culturally literacy. While the presenter was beginning her overview, I unconsciously began counting people in the room. Turning to my colleague I whispered, “42 students, 14 of which appear to be students of color, and 11 staff are here. That’s pretty good.” She then whispered back, “Gavin, you assess everything.”

Perhaps I do. Is that a bad thing? Is it unhealthy? Should I seek professional help?

Recently, I was in the grocery store and I had a realization:

Assessment isn’t an activity.
It’s a state of mind.

In this brief, we present some thoughts from our dean, Dr. Richard Schwab, and some information on the three accreditations that will take place over the next year. So, the next time we are at a faculty meeting and CAPTE, APA and/or NCATE is noted, this edition gives you additional information on the assessment side of accreditation.

And finally, we are excited that we are offering nine colloquia this spring. Four write-ups are included in this brief. Among these is the wonderful New Zealand researcher, Dr. John Hattie, who gave a fabulous presentation. All presentations continue to be available at our site:
http://www.education.uconn.edu/assessment/

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As part of President Obama’s American Recovery and Reclamation Act (ARRA) to stimulate the economy, U. S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan announced on April 1 that $44 billion for states and schools is available to support educational reform efforts and also save teaching jobs that are at-risk due to local budget cuts.

At the heart of his message is that reform without accountability is not an option. We have worked diligently as a team to make use of evidence-based practice the way we conduct business in all aspects of our programs. While we still have work to do, we have come a long way since my first days on the job as dean, 12 years ago. About that time, an NCATE team was conducting a site visit. One of our faculty members proudly informed the group that we didn’t need to use program assessment data in our teacher education program because the program was already better than any other around. That is no longer the prevailing attitude of our faculty or leadership team.

Assessment data, both qualitative and quantitative, is now an accepted and necessary part of our lives as educational practitioners and researchers. Fortunately, outstanding research conducted by Neag School faculty and graduate students utilize mixed methods strategies to assess student learning in a wide range of research efforts relating to school reform. This scholarship has embraced the linking of student achievement data to intervention strategies in critical areas such as literacy, mathematics education, behavioral support, talent development, and teacher education. With this rich history of research and translating research-to-practice, we are in a very strong position to be a major partner in the ARRA school reform initiatives in Connecticut and nationally.

Our nation is experiencing one of the most challenging times in history. Through ARRA we have been given a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to influence educational reform. Those of us who take federal and state funds to make meaningful reform, must exert as much effort in tracking the successes or failures of our efforts as we do to design our interventions. It’s not only a requirement to secure funds; it is also the only way we will know if our efforts warrant future investment.

Richard L. Schwab, Ph.D.
Dean of the Neag School of Education
This is similar for a student participating in a program who doesn’t learn everything we had intended. I start the way many of you start your grocery shopping. I take the list from the refrigerator and rewrite it in the order I will approach the items in the store. Nothing ruins a good “grocery run” more than having finished your shopping and realizing you forgot something at the other end of your store. Putting the items on the list in this order is very similar to what we do with students. When we develop our learning goals and outcomes, we do so in a progressive way since students need to do develop lower level skills such as remembering before they can do more complex things such as synthesis and evaluation. Once I have my list, I then need to decide what is the best day and time to go shopping. I typically go early on Sunday mornings since the store is almost empty then. However, there is a balancing act in reaching my goals. While there may be few customers at 7 a.m., the stockers haven’t filled all of the shelves yet, particularly the produce. Thus, I can quickly go through the store, but I might not be able to get everything on my list.

Now if I go later, say 9 a.m., the shelves are stocked, but there are many more people in store. Navigation is much more difficult because there are many more obstacles. I feel like I am in a movie car chase scene – weaving around other shoppers, dodging the soda delivery guys with their large pallets on the side of the aisle, and pushing the cart with my left hand so I can grab the items off the shelf with my right hand without stopping. I really think I could be a much more efficient shopper if I had a bell or horn on my cart. Rrring. Rrring. Honk. HONK! The other challenge to shopping at 9 a.m. is long check-out lines. These are the biggest waste of time since you aren’t accomplishing anything. I can only read so much about Britney Spears and aliens in Congress.

Finally, I decided that I could most efficiently and effectively reach my goal by going shopping around 8 a.m. on Sundays. The shelves are stocked. And although there a few people in the store, there aren’t enough to be a hindrance. Also, by the time I get to the register, they usually have three lanes open, so I don’t have to wait. I can usually get in and out of the store in about 20 minutes. This approach to grocery shopping is assessment – establishing a goal, developing strategies to reach that goal, and then determining how effectively and efficiently you’ve reached it. I am sure you do a lot more assessment than you think.

After the cultural literacy presentation, I was talking with a student and she asked what I thought about it. I began saying that students were engaged and there were some really insightful points about bias of the SAT that demonstrated reflective and critical thinking. After that conversation, I realized that I had just assessed that presentation. Of course it wasn’t a systemitized in the sense that learning outcomes weren’t established and then evaluated based on multiple data collection methods, but nonetheless, it was assessment.

For me, assessment is not just an activity. It’s a state of mind. The more systemitized, the better, but any assessment is better than no assessment. Assessment can’t just be an afterthought. Some types need to be embedded in everything we do. This will enable us to create the best possible educational experience so that students to foster holistic growth. The more assessment you do, the more it will creep into other parts of your life.

Is that such a bad thing?

Checkbox In Action

Mallory Coleman
School Psychology Program

The Neag School recently purchased the web-based survey application software Checkbox. This software is primarily used for converting paper-based surveys from the past, new surveys, and forms to an online version.

The Educational Psychology department’s School Psychology program is one of the first programs to utilize this new software in order to collect feedback from current students, alumni, and from practicum and internship supervisors. For example, the latest survey was used to evaluate students enrolled in a practicum course. This yearly assessment was previously conducted using a paper-based format. With the help of this new software, both the students’ practicum supervisors and the students themselves completed the surveys online. This enabled the program to receive survey results in a more effective and efficient manner.

If you wish to know more about how Checkbox can be used for your program, please contact Mary Yakimowski, the Director of Assessment.
What’s Happening to the Neag School tied to Accreditation?

Lukas Kailimang
School Counseling Program

The Neag School is experiencing three major accreditation undertakings within the year. Accreditation agencies are now, more than ever, increasing the importance placed on assessment.

The Neag School of Education Assessment Plan, developed by the Neag faculty, staff, and students, was developed in alignment with the requirement of various accreditation agencies. In the following, we will discuss the preparation of our Physical Therapy (PT), School Psychology, and the teacher preparation programs ahead of the upcoming comprehensive review by their respective accreditation bodies.

The PT program holds the distinguished reputation of being one of the oldest programs in the country. In fact, it was the first PT program ever founded at a public university (1952) and has maintained an accredited status since the inception of the Commission for Accreditation of Physical Therapy Education (CAPTE). In light of the next review by CAPTE in 2010, data collection, analyses, and reporting are underway. These include data on graduation rates and attrition, passing rate on the PT licensure examination, as well as information gathered from alumni and their employers.

Similarly, the doctoral program in School Psychology is preparing for the next reaccreditation process. In adherence to the American Psychological Association (APA) accreditation standards, our doctoral program will be rigorously evaluated in various domains, such as: program philosophy, objectives, curriculum and plan, eligibility, program resources, sensitivity to cultural and individual differences and diversity, etc. Through the continuous use of assessment tools for improvement and innovation in our school psychology program, we will be ready for the upcoming comprehensive review in the fall of 2009.

The Neag School of Education was last accredited by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) for a five-year period in 2004. The next cycle of review will occur in 2010. This NCATE accreditation process is intended to evaluate, enhance, and publicly recognize the quality of the program in preparing teachers and other school specialists (i.e., administrator preparation programs, school psychology, school counseling, speech). Since NCATE encompasses teacher education in various fields, most of the specialty areas will be evaluated by its corresponding agency.

For example, in accordance to the standards for science teacher preparation, which are set by the National Science Teacher Association (NSTA), teacher candidates in the Neag School will be assessed through a combination of standardized test performance (Praxis), transcript analysis (for content courses), and field experience evaluations (e.g., student teaching and internship), along with demonstrations of an ability to prepare instructional materials (lesson plans and unit designs).

In the area of Mathematics, the Neag assessment plan is also in alignment with the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) standards. The program report must demonstrate that 80% of indicators are addressed with at least one indicator addressed in each of the 10 NCTM standards. The Neag teacher preparation program must also provide evidence of a state-required licensure or certification exam.

For reading, the International Reading Association (IRA) manages the standards for future reading professionals including classroom teachers, reading specialists, administrators and teacher educators. For reaccreditation purpose, the Neag School is expected to satisfy the five IRA core standards: foundational knowledge; instructional strategies and curriculum materials; assessment, diagnosis, and evaluation; creating a literate environment; and, professional development. The Neag School has prepared and administers eight IRA-required assessments, in addition to the data on state-licensure or certification exams to be presented to IRA reviewers.

For additional information on the assessment plan across all five departments in the Neag School, please refer to the Neag School of Education Assessment Plan Handbook – September 2008, or you may contact Mary Yakimowski, the Director of Assessment at: mary.yakimowski@uconn.edu.
We know that, in general, three factors account for academic success in college: high school grades, high school courses (number, rigor, highest level completed), and admissions tests. And we know that students are college ready when they have the knowledge, skills, and behaviors to successfully complete a college course of study without remediation. So how do we get from A to B? The College Board suggests that we must develop a metric that uses these three factors in predicting if a student is college ready.

On February 20, 2009, Dr. Thanos Patelis, the Executive Director of Data and Reporting Products from The College Board, presented the College Board’s fledgling College Readiness Indicator System at the first colloquium of the New Year. This indicator system is projected to be the aforementioned metric. The College Board suggests that college readiness should be assessed through four measures. First, through academic knowledge and skill evidenced by successful completion of a thorough high school curriculum. Second, through success in college-level courses taken during their high school career that require substantial subject-area knowledge, higher-order thinking abilities, and strong study and research skills. Third, by demonstrating advanced academic skills, such as reasoning, problem solving, analysis, and writing abilities. Lastly, and maybe the least studied of the four, college planning skills which comprised of the understanding of college, understanding of career options, and comprehension of college admissions and financing process.

With the above framework in mind, The College Board plans on first computing a measure of “academic rigor” that would be able to predict college success through assessment of the number and type of courses taken in certain academic subjects through high schools. Second, The College Board plans on utilizing the National Student Clearinghouse to validate the metric through an SAT validity study. Third, The College Board plans on demonstrating that when this
Readiness Indicator

Continued from previous page

The academic rigor metric is combined with both High School GPA and SAT scores, there is a significantly better chance of predicting college success than without the metric. Fourth, The College Board plans on establishing the College Readiness metric (i.e. SAT, High School GPA, and Academic Rigor combined) as a national benchmark which will be given to students, schools, and states.

It seems, then, that the culture of assessment in college admission is shifting. Not only will achievement (GPA) and performance (SAT) be evaluated, but also the academic rigor. While Dr. Patelis stressed that this is only a model and a draft of the indicator system, The College Board hopes to start providing school, state, and national data on College Readiness in the beginning of August 2009.

Value Added Assessment

Continued from previous page

Also interesting was the effect on student achievement by teachers who were not content certified. Figure 2 showed that in every content area, teachers who were not content certified had negative effects on their students compared to teachers who were content certified.

A similar effect can be seen among new teachers. Figure 3 showed the effect of teachers’ years of experience on student achievement per year, suggesting that new teachers in Louisiana take on average eight years to start having positive effects on their students compared to other teachers (i.e. new teachers are having a positive effect, but not as great as their more experienced teachers for eight years).

Overall Dr. Noell’s research helps explain and quantify the specific effects of both student, teacher, and school factors on student outcomes. These effects are similar to what the Teachers for a New Era project is trying to find by studying the effect of teachers’ university education (i.e., where they went to school) on student outcome in Connecticut. If we can figure out what predicts high student achievement then hopefully we can then start figuring out how we can improve it.

Impact of Teachers Who Are Not Content Certified

Teachers who are certified in the content area they are teaching are more effective than those who are not certified to teach that content.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Coefficient (CI)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>-3.50 (-4.70, -2.28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>-1.27 (-1.72, -0.82)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Arts</td>
<td>-4.09 (-4.70, -2.28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>-1.58 (-2.34, -0.82)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Studies</td>
<td>-3.32 (-4.61, -2.03)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2.

Important Decisions Defining New Teachers
(2007 study data)

Figure 3.

The full PowerPoint presentation from this colloquium can be found at:
Wouldn’t it be great if we could put all the information in education that makes difference in students’ learning in a continuum?

In an effort to answer this question, Dr. Hattie conducted research about the influences on achievement in school-aged students and published the findings in his latest book entitled Visible Learning: A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement (Routledge, New York 2009). Dr. Hattie presented some of these findings in the third colloquium of our spring series. He started the presentation by discussing the effect of reducing class size. The results of the meta-analysis on a sample of half million students produced an effect size of 0.2. What happens when people see this number? Every politician, every teacher, every parent and every program evaluator insists we must reduce class size. Dr. Hattie argues that instead of comparing the effect of small class size with large class size, we should be asking the question, “compared to all the other things we do, what is the influence of class size?” He then calculated the typical average effect of various programs or interventions reported in the literature. The most trivial question is whether we can enhance the achievement. Thus, he has examined a significant number of research to identify all the other things we do; results of his study were driven by over 800 meta-analyses, 50,000 studies, and more than 200 million students revealed that typical effect size was 0.4. This indicates that effect of class size is below the average.

From a measurement perspective, it is important not only to look at the average effect but also the distribution of these effect sizes. He noticed that 95% of the programs in education enhance achievement. It is evidently obvious that it is impossible not to improve achievement. The overarching question then becomes “what is the common denominator?” The following chart summarized this average effect to convey the story.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Effect Size</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Student teacher relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Teaching study skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Reading recovery</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Cooperative learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Homework</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Individualized Instruction</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Ability grouping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Open versus traditional classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Retention (hold back a year)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Shifting schools</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Next, Dr. Hattie asked colloquium participants to rank the effect sizes of some of the influences. His findings from these large scale studies suggested the following top and bottom effect sizes on achievement.

Dr. Hattie stated, that as a researcher in the area of education, he is fascinated by how often we perpetuate programs that do not work. He argued that most of the things, which dominated current debates on what we should do, are not working. It is imperative to remind others that his results were based on a vast number of meta-analysis studies spanning over 200 million student sample. Therefore, it is very complicated to synthesize and suggest one single conclusion about the study. [Note: His contribution to the literature through this work is remarkable.]

There were many other effect sizes of the programs on achievement that he explored such as, but not limited to, prior achievement, self-verbalization & self-questioning, problem solving teaching, not labelling students, and self-concept. More details of his studies can be found on our web site.

Having examined all different effects of programs on achievement, as shown in the above pie chart, Dr. Hattie concluded that majority of the achievement variance can be explained by students followed by teachers. Then the question is: “should the students be their own teachers?” Dr. Hattie postulated that visible teaching and visible learning occurs “When teachers SEE learning through the eyes of the student.”
Putting the Value Back in Evaluation: Using Standard Setting to Determine the Success in Health Initiatives

Wei Xia

Evaluation & Measurement Program

Dr. Clinton-Hattie is a senior academic in evaluation and the Director of the Bachelor in Health Science in the School of Population Health at the University of Auckland, New Zealand. In our 4th spring colloquium, she stated that program evaluation requires a judgment about merit and/or worth. She claimed that a central question for evaluators is “how good is good enough?” and “how do you know?”

Dr. Clinton-Hattie conducted a group activity - the chocolate chip cookies exercise - by involving all colloquium participants. Through the activity of exploring success criterion for chocolate chip cookies, Dr. Clinton-Hattie illustrated standard setting as an approach to systematically judge levels of success. She also demonstrated that standard setting can be a powerful tool in program evaluation in either large or small evaluation, and it is particularly true of collaborative or community based evaluation in health settings. Dr. Clinton-Hattie described standard setting as a process of rationally-deriving, consistently-applying and describing procedures on which judgments can be made. The process which decides on a “cut-score” in creating distinct and defensible categories, which describes the attributes of each category, and the methodology is based on theories of judgment analysis and attribution theory.

Next, Dr. Clinton-Hattie talked about how the standard setting methodology was applied in the evaluation of the National Chronic Care Management project, and the related analysis of results. She also mentioned some drawbacks for standard settings, such as resource intensive, possible problematic analysis, and pressures.

Finally, standard setting applications in community setting and the conceptual and cultural issues related to the use of standard setting were discussed.

Evidently, these suggestions bring a contrast; an active teacher, passionate for their subject and for learning, a change agent OR a facilitative, inquiry or discovery-based provider of engaging activities? Then he investigated effects of two types of teaching: one as activator and the other as facilitator. His findings are described in the table above.

As previously mentioned, it is not possible to summarize the findings of this comprehensive study in such a short article but if you are interested in more details about Dr. Hattie’s findings, please refer to his power points at:

These days, everywhere you turn people are talking about assessment (partly due to the wonderful colloquia on assessment). They are concerned about what to assess, how to assess it, and what to do with the results. But while everyone is talking about assessment OF learning, maybe the real focus should be assessment FOR learning.

Dr. Katie Moirs, from the Connecticut State Department of Education’s Bureau of Educator Preparation, Certification, Support, and Assessment, discussed this topic during a recent colloquium presentation. Due to recent changes in assessment by the state, instead of rank ordering students, educators are now using both formative and summative assessments, so that all students can learn. Dr. Moirs mentioned two levels at which student learning is being inadequately monitored: the institutional and benchmarks. Problems with these levels are the delay in results and infrequent assessment. Another level of monitoring student learning is at the classroom level. Unlike the first two levels, this level is the most critical but the least emphasized.

The solution to these problems, according to Dr. Moirs, is to build an assessment literacy course into teacher preparation programs. Topics covered in her proposed course include cognitive frameworks about learning, assessment tool development and use, data analysis and interpretation, and differentiation of instruction.

Assessment tool development was the area on which Dr. Moirs concentrated most of her presentation. She discussed the difference between selected-response format and constructed-response format assessments, how they fit within cognitive frameworks, and how they are used to assess achievement targets.

Dr. Moirs concluded her session by noting that assessment literacy is critical in today’s schools because, since the RtI movement will always be about standardized testing, teachers need to understand the test and the reasoning behind its usage. Assessment literacy among our teachers will become particularly imperative in light of the state-mandated implementation of SRBI (Scientific Research-Based Interventions), which is Connecticut’s framework of RtI, by July 1, 2009.

Read current events on page 11.
Prof. Hariharan Swaminathan, Head of Educational Psychology Department, welcomed the audience and officially opened the colloquium.

Dr. Janet Clinton, explained the standard-setting process in evaluating chronic care management programs in New Zealand.

This spring assessment colloquia series attracted the interests of both researchers and practitioners in the field of education.

Dr. Kate Moirs emphasized that educators must be assessment-literate.

Dr. John Hattie presented some of the findings from over 800 meta-analyses on the influences on achievement in school-aged students.
Spotlight on Assessment Colloquia

Neag School of Education is pleased to announce the following colloquia as part of our Spotlight on Assessment series for Spring 2009. Save the date for these exciting sessions.

**Exploring Assessment in New Ways Using Husky CT**
Janet Jordan, UConn’s Instructional Resource Center
Friday, April 24, 2009 (11:30 AM - 1:00 PM)

**"Big Rocks" of Effective Instruction: How to Think Like a Great Teacher**
Samantha Kennedy, Achievement First
Friday, May 1, 2009 (11:30 AM - 1:00 PM)

**Value Added Assessment: The Connecticut Story for Creating the Scale and its Uses/Misuses to Understand the Fourth Generation of the Connecticut Mastery Test**
Hariharan Swaminathan, Professor and Department Head, Neag School of Education, Department of Educational Psychology
Thursday, May 7, 2009 (11:30 AM - 1:00 PM)

Please join us and register at: [http://www.education.uconn.edu/assessment/](http://www.education.uconn.edu/assessment/)

There is no charge for assessment colloquia; however, participants must preregister.

For more information contact mary.yakimowski@uconn.edu or call 860-486-2848.