

Enhancing Learning through Continuous Assessment System

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Context

National Planning Commission (NPC), has explored the issues inheriting with the Continuous Assessment System (CAS) while discussing about program and budget for the academic year 2010/011. To strengthen CAS, firstly understanding and internalization for the establishment of theoretical and practical base about what, why and how aspects are essential, building with three constructs of CAS such as Inquiry, Action, and Advocacy (IAA) as well, otherwise we will not be able to change the worse situation of children's learning and retention. Projecting huge levels of resources in this area will not yield any result, if it is neglected inherent aspects of CAS. Therefore, total assessment on CAS practice is needed before investing huge amount of money, Rs. fifteen crore seventy seven thousands proposed for the years 2010/2011 respectively. These three constructs call for focus on learning and performance; help the schools to accomplish their missions and strategic plans, show progress in student/candidate learning outcomes

identified by means of several different learning dimensions. Thus, in a time when Nepal is striving for access, quality and efficiency in education has initiated Continuous Assessments System (CAS) as a liberal promotion policy, mostly after Master plan of BPEP II (MOE, 1997), Program Implementation Plan of BPEP II (1999-2004) have provided strategic vision for the implementation of CAS firstly as a pilot basis in five districts. Then we realized its theoretical and practical strength. MTEF (2002/3-2004/5) have accepted to expand its scope in primary level and accordingly revised the curriculum, accommodating with CAS aspects at grade 1-3. For its effective implementation honesty, initiation and hard work is required (MOE, 2001). Because the intent of CAS is to arouse internal efficiency through the introduction of rigorous remedial support programme expecting not to have any grade repetition. For this work to happen, result based performance (MOF, 2009) and various incentives provisions have introduced like: provision of

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scholarships and incentives to complete basic education for children from economically and socially marginalized families, strengthen scholarship distribution and monitoring mechanism through SMCs and provision of incentives to motivate schools to strive for better performance (SSRP,2009).

Continuous assessment activities allow us to identify what our students are learning and enable them to improve the learning environment through our courses and academic programs. To ensure continuous learning and to enhance quality in education the continuous assessment system is the key to assist children individually for learning. Apart from that, it is also helpful to reduce dropouts in one hand and increase retention on the other. This means, it is also helpful to promote equity and access of children and efficiency of teachers. So, the CAS is practicing time and again as a lesson learns in the SSR, it is introducing pervasive manner calling assessment for excellence. Assessment instruments are designed to answer a wide range of self-evaluative questions related to the contents, expectations, and course objectives.

Theoretical aspects

The second trend, “assessment for accountability,” is essentially a regulatory process, designed to assure institutional conformity to specified norms. Accountability

advocates, including especially state legislatures, to a considerable extent view colleges as factories and higher education as a production process (Astin, 1993, p.17), although there is widespread disagreement about what exactly they are supposed to produce, and about how to measure it (Ewell, 1997). Nevertheless, various performance measures, which attempt to measure institutional effectiveness, particularly with regard to fiscal efficiency and resource productivity, have been created and applied to public universities and colleges throughout the country. Although the terms "assessment" and "accountability" are often used interchangeably, they have important differences. In general, when we assess our own performance, it's assessment; when others assess our performance, it's accountability. That is, assessment is a set of initiatives we take to monitor the results of our actions and improve ourselves; accountability is a set of initiatives others take to monitor the results of our actions, and to penalize or reward us based on the outcomes. They have very different flavors. Although assessment efforts over the past several years have been largely focused on aggregate statistics for entire schools, accreditation review boards recently have been increasing pressure on institutions to actively

engage departments and students in the assessment-learning- change cycle (Gentemann, 1994). If learning is our business, how well are we doing at all levels (assessment), and how can we demonstrate that to others (accountability)?

Continuous assessment is a classroom strategy implemented by teachers to ascertain the knowledge, understanding, and skills attained by pupils. Teachers administer assessments in a variety of ways over time to allow them to observe multiple tasks and to collect information about what pupils know, understand, and can do. These assessments are curriculum-based tasks previously taught in class. Continuous assessment occurs frequently during the school year and is part of regular teacher-pupil interactions. Pupils receive feedback from teachers based on their performance that allows them to focus on topics they have not yet mastered. Teachers learn which students need review and remediation and which pupils are ready to move on to more complex work. Thus, the results of the assessments help to ensure that all pupils make learning progress throughout the school cycle thereby increasing their academic achievement. The continuous assessment process is much more

than an examination of pupil achievement. Continuous assessment is also a powerful diagnostic tool that enables pupils to understand the areas in which they are having difficulty and to concentrate their efforts in those areas. Continuous assessment also allows teachers to monitor the impact of their lessons on pupil understanding. Teachers can modify their pedagogical strategies to include the construction of remediation activities for pupils who are not working at the expected grade level and the creation of enrichment activities for pupils who are working at or above the expected grade level. Hence, the continuous assessment process supports a cycle of self-evaluation and pupil-specific activities by both pupils and teachers. Frequent interactions between pupils and teachers means that teachers know the strengths and weaknesses of their learners. These exchanges foster a pupil-teacher relationship based on individual interactions. Pupils learn that the teacher values their achievements and that their assessment outcomes have an impact on the instruction that they receive. One-to-one communication between the teacher and the pupil can motivate pupils to continue attending school and to work hard to achieve higher levels of mastery. In

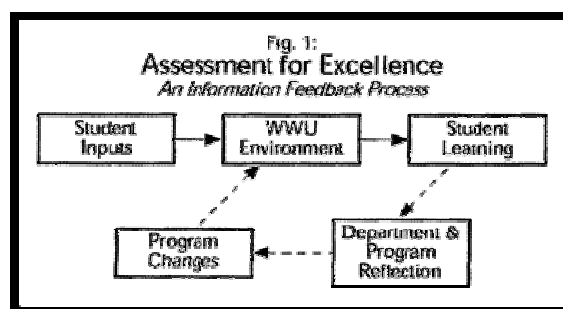
continuous assessment, teachers assess the curriculum as implemented in the classroom. It also allows teachers to evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching strategies relative to the curriculum, and to change those strategies as dictated by the needs of their pupils. In addition, continuous assessments provide information on achievement of particular levels of skills, understanding, and knowledge rather than achievement of certain marks or scores. Thus, continuous assessment enables pupils to monitor their achievement of grade level goals and to visualize their progress towards those goals.

Assessment for Excellence

Assessment is not an end in itself but a vehicle for educational improvement." (AAHE, 1992). As shown in Figure 1,

the attributes of entering students, measurement of an array of student outcomes provides feedback about how well individual courses, programs, and the university as a whole are accomplishing their stated missions and goals. Assessment aims at the continuing improvement of student development, and is generally consistent with a "value-added" concept of education; note that the rationale for having better programs is to ensure better student outcomes.

As shown in Figure 1, the collection of assessment information is only the first step in a four-part process. To be useful, it must be analyzed and reflected upon by appropriate decision makers, and then used to design and apply changes. In each iterative cycle, modified programs are then reassessed and readjusted, continually improving effectiveness.



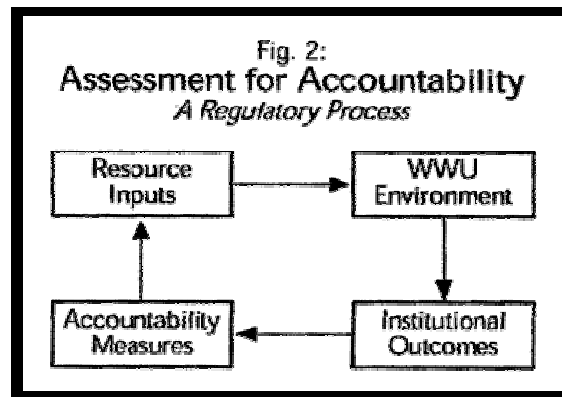
Even at the departmental level, new guidelines for program reviews are shifting the focus away from a preoccupation with departmental assets or curricular structure and

more toward "how resources are used, the consequences of these uses, and the way in which students actually experience the major" (Gentemann, 1994).

Assessment for Accountability

Accountability measures are an attempt to assert more direct public control over higher education, as shown in Figure 2. They are primarily concerned with resource allocation and fiscal efficiency. While it is completely appropriate

for those who pay the bills--taxpayers, parents, and students--to evaluate critically what they get for their money from public education, performance measures as they are currently defined in Washington State remain problematical, for at least two reasons.



First, because they are measured on arbitrary scales, their meanings are ambiguous. Second, the measures themselves direct institutional goals to some extent, rather than the other way around. Resulting University policy is driven to achieve specific measurement targets, and these may be at odds with the University's larger mission and goals, including the enhancement of student learning. Two performance measures which illustrate this point are fall to fall retention of students and the

graduation efficiency index; both are commonly regarded as measures to be maximized. The rationale is that for the sake of fiscal efficiency, a student should enter school, stay enrolled, take only the courses necessary to graduate, and then leave as soon as possible to make room for another student. This kind of thinking assumes a factory model of education, in which the measure of output is degree attainment, and the measure of cost is time to degree.

Such a view penalizes institutions for various kinds of normal student behavior which make the numbers look bad, but which might serve students and their educations very well--like taking double major or taking elective courses irrelevant to the major. Incentives are created for institutions to eliminate these students, to narrow their educational options, or to encourage them to go elsewhere for their educations, all questionable goals from the standpoint of student learning.

Assessment derives its legitimacy from the quality of its measurements; and those being measured generally best know the area being assessed. University mission statements ought to be the place to find out what is important, and therefore what should be measured. Since student learning figures prominently in most academic mission statements, student learning outcomes may have special appeal as performance measures.

Strategic aspects of supporting students

1. Revisions to accreditation standards
2. Replacement of outcome,
3. process-based
4. Identity of learning

Introduce relevance aspects

5. Ensure accountability measures
6. Direct assessment focusing on observable outcomes (knowledge, skills, and competencies)
7. Outcomes should be broken down into specific activities
8. Embedded measures in instructional design
9. Establish regular, systematic, process to enable feedback and continuous improvement

Arouse positive responses

- Begin with a clear understanding and consensus of the learning mission of the curriculum content
- Develop student-learning outcome goals based on the content
- Design a comprehensive assessment plan
- Create appropriate assessment measures
- Implement link the assessment with the learning
- Provide prompt and continuous feedback to various learners
- Use the assessment data to evaluate the assessment process and make changes to improve student learning outcomes.

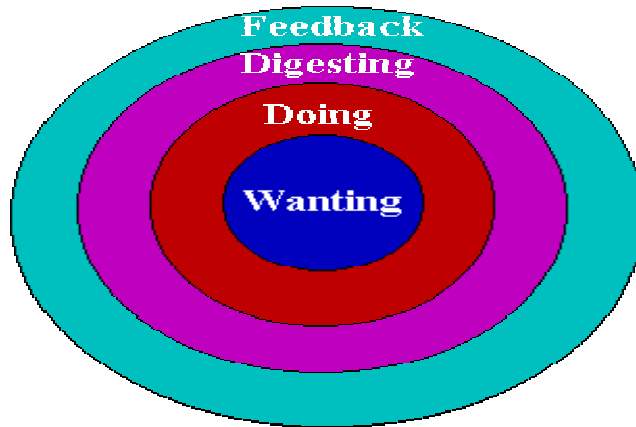
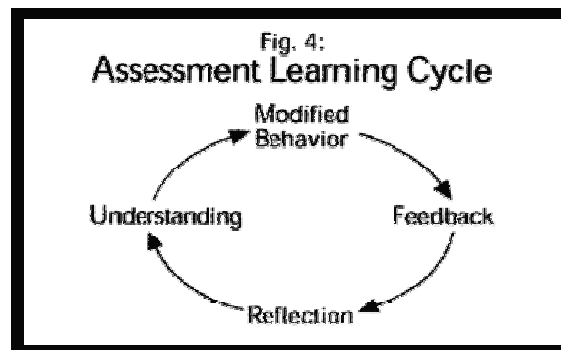


Figure: 3 Model for reinforcing children's learning outcomes

The assessment of learning cycle

Assessment will be a fundamental and integral part of any curriculum based on student learning outcomes. Basically the same assessment

learning cycle, shown in Figure 4, takes place at the levels of the student, the course, the program, the college, and the university as a whole.



It is worth emphasizing: assessment is not just the measurement of learning; it is in itself an integral part of learning. Assessment is the first step in a continual learning cycle which includes measurement,

feedback, reflection, and change. The purpose of assessment is not merely to gather information; the purpose of assessment is to foster improvement. Frequent assessment of students helps them to refine concepts and

deepen their understanding; it also conveys high expectations, which further stimulate learning. "Students overwhelmingly reported that the single most important ingredient for making a course effective is getting rapid response" (Wiggins, 1997).

Similarly, assessments of faculty teaching by students and faculty development consultants help teachers to improve their teaching and course organization. Program assessments tell departments and curriculum committees how well programs are meeting their objectives; and comprehensive university-level assessments provide feedback about how effectively university policies are contributing to the accomplishment of the university's mission and goals.

Over several years beginning in 1988, a group of distinguished scholars met regularly to share ideas and experiences and to formulate principles for assessment. Their set of "Nine Principles of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning," (AAHE Assessment Forum, 1992) is patterned after the learning principles discussed above, and clarifies the linkages between assessment and student learning:

1. The assessment of student learning begins with educational values.

We measure what is most

important to our mission and goals.

2. Assessment is most effective when it reflects an understanding of learning as multidimensional, integrated, and revealed in performance over time. Learning entails not only what students know but what they can do with what they know; it involves not only knowledge and abilities but values, attitudes, and habits of mind that affect both academic success and performance beyond the classroom.
3. Assessment works best when the programs it seeks to improve have clear, explicitly stated purposes. Assessment is a goal-oriented process. Assessment as a process pushes a campus toward clarity about where to aim and what standards to apply; clear, shared, implementable goals are the cornerstone for assessment that is focused and useful.
4. Assessment requires attention to outcomes but also and equally to the experiences that lead to those outcomes. To improve outcomes, we need to know the curricula, teaching, and student effort that lead to particular outcomes.
5. Assessment works best when it is ongoing, not episodic. Though isolated, "one-shot" assessment can be better than none,

improvement is best fostered when assessment entails a linked series of activities undertaken over time, monitoring progress toward intended goals in a spirit of continuous improvement.

6. Assessment fosters wider improvement when representatives from across the educational community are involved. Student learning is a campus-wide responsibility; the aim over time is to involve people from across the educational community. Assessment is not a task for small groups of experts but a collaborative activity; its aim is wider, better-informed attention to student learning by all parties with a stake in its improvement.
7. Assessment makes a difference when it begins with issues of use and illuminates questions that people really care about. To be useful, information must be connected to issues or questions that people really care about. The point of assessment is not to gather data and return "results"; it is a process that starts with the questions of decision-makers, that involves them in the gathering and interpreting of data, and that informs and helps guide continuous improvement.
8. Assessment is most likely to lead to improvement when it is part of

a larger set of conditions that promote change. Assessment alone changes little. Its greatest contribution comes on campuses where the quality of teaching and learning is visibly valued and worked at, where information about learning outcomes is seen as an integral part of decision-making

9. Through assessment, educators meet responsibilities to students and to the public. Our deepest obligation--to ourselves, our students, and society--is to improve. Those to whom educators are accountable have a corresponding obligation to support such attempts at improvement

Conclusion

There are ample evidences to suggest that reorienting Western's educational policies and practices toward the improvement of student learning outcomes would, over time, significantly improve the quality of education of Nepali pupils.

Such a reorientation would necessarily be an ongoing process; over time it would likely constitute a quantum shift in our approach to education. It would probably imply changes over time in our mission and goals, in the structure of our curricula, in assessment procedures from the classroom on up, in the

responsibilities of faculty, staff, and administrators, and in the organizational structure of the University. However, all of these are the kinds of changes which can evolve in an organic way specific to Western and its community of students, faculty, staff, and administrators. The important thing is to begin the process, and to allow it to develop. The knowledge element which enables professional educators to:

- use their general and subject area knowledge to enable students to learn and communicate effectively with others, and
- use technological knowledge and collaborative techniques to foster active inquiry, problem solving, and performance skills among learners.

The skill element which enables professional educators to:

- use techniques and strategies to create learning environments that foster student intellectual, social, and personal development, and
- use technology and collaborative learning strategies to foster active inquiry, problem solving, and performance skills among learners, and
- use reflection and outcome assessments to improve learning experiences.

The dispositional element which enables professional educators to:

- create a climate of openness, inquiry, and support by using strategies that develop an atmosphere of acceptance and appreciation for diverse individuals and groups in the larger community, and
- practice behavior meeting ethical and professional standards while striving for continual personal improvement.

Interwoven throughout courses and experiences in all programs are learning opportunities that foster an array of knowledge, skills, and dispositional outcomes with special emphasis on diversity and technology. These elements are integrated throughout all courses and clinical experiences to provide a seamless experience as candidates move from novice to expert.

Recommendations

A true commitment to student learning is a paradigm shift, but it doesn't have to happen all at once. The first recommendation--the all-important first step--is to initiate a school wide exploration and discussion of whether and how to redefine mission and goals to reflect a commitment to excellence in student learning, and to define strategies for achieving learning needs. Faculty within academic units must bear a particular responsibility for beginning a dialogue about their own

major programs, examining their willingness and ability to restructure their programs, courses, and assessment procedures to be consistent with improving learning outcomes. They must be willing to ask the three questions: 1) What should our majors know; 2) How can they best learn these things; and 3) How can we measure our success at teaching them? The second recommendation is to establish some kind of "Faculty Development Center," which would provide confidential consultations, resource and technical support, and training to help faculty develop as teachers. Such an office could be an extension of the new Center for Instructional Innovation, or it could be modeled after the Learning Resources Unit at BCIT mentioned in Section 2, which provides a wide range of support services, including course development, definition of course objectives, assessment alternatives, and skills development. We should want to provide explicit support to improve both the quality of teaching and also the productivity of individual faculty, and to provide incentives for teaching excellence.

1. Demonstrates a positive attitude about working with diverse students, peers, professionals, and in diverse environments.
2. Attends classes and field experiences consistently and

punctually (including not arriving late or leaving early).

3. Demonstrates honesty and integrity.
4. Communicates effectively both orally and in writing.
5. Demonstrates positive interactions with peers, faculty, P-12 students, and school personnel.
6. Demonstrates a commitment to P-12 students' success and to maintenance of a positive learning environment.
7. Demonstrates self-respect and respect for others.
8. Accepts constructive criticism and is willing to modify one's behavior.
9. Analyzes problems critically and attempts to resolve them independently.
10. Assumes personal responsibility for adhering to professional guidelines regarding academic conduct.
11. Assumes personal responsibility for adhering to established guidelines for the Teacher Education Program.
12. Maintains professional ethics, appearance, and demeanor.
13. Our students will give evidence of critical thinking abilities, including such things as analytical and decision making skills.

14. Our students will be effective communicators in written and oral communication
15. Our students will be ethically competent decision makers
16. Our students will give evidence of professional and disciplinary excellence by practicing Professional & Disciplinary Excellence Measure [ETS] Our students will provide evidence of an ability & willingness to assume leadership roles in learning.
17. Our students will be responsible and contributing members of the groups and enhance social communication.
18. Review the past experience of CAS and initiate to implement those aspects of learning.
19. Start the program of payment by result for the motivation of teachers.