

EXEMPLAR ASSESSMENT VIGNETTE & ANALYSIS

Big D for Attitude

One of the subjects that I liked the best when I was in Grade 8 in French-language school in Ontario was History. I remember building a model of the Boston Tea Party using part of a wine basket that I found in our kitchen pantry. Later we had to write a report, and I copied and coloured a political cartoon from one of my Dad's books for the duo-tang. My teacher wasn't impressed with my model or the cartoon, but I enjoyed working on them. And I was really proud when we got our final exams back because I had a high mark – the highest I'd ever received. That's why I was so shocked on the last day of the school year when I got my report card. The teacher handed them to us in sealed envelopes, but of course we all opened them as we flooded out of the school towards our school buses. There was a big "D" in History on my report card! I really didn't understand why. I ran back and found my History teacher erasing the blackboard in her classroom. She told me that I got the grade I deserved because of my bad attitude. I argued with her, and I finally said, "You can't just change my grade like that!" She laughed and said, "Obviously I can, since I have."

Assessment Purpose

I don't recall my teacher ever discussing the purpose of assessment, but in retrospect this vignette involves assessment *of* learning. While some of the projects we did were fun, such as the model building, we weren't given feedback with the expectation that we would continue the learning process, which would be consistent with assessment for learning, or formative assessment (Wiliam, 2011). Instead, we just handed our work in once, and our teacher graded it and collected the results for writing report cards. The exam was a traditional year-end assessment, where our achievement was communicated to us symbolically with a mark written at the top (Earl & Katz, 2006).

Assessment Method

I mention three assessments in this vignette. The model and the report were both products, which McMillan, Hellsten & Klinger (2011) classify as constructed response performance tasks. I realized in thinking about this event that I remember that I did well on that exam, but I don't remember taking it at all. If it was typical of the kind of exams we were usually given, it would have been made by the teacher with a mix of items, like matching words and definitions, and short answer items, and a question or two that required a longer answer at the end.

Quality Issues

Several quality issues are evident in my vignette. On the positive side, the teacher did use multiple assessments instead of just the single exam. In theory, this should have made the

inference (grade) more reliable (McMillan et al., 2011). However, arguments can be seen against the validity of the inference about my learning. First, there is evidence of construct irrelevance (Hubley & Zumbo, 2011), which means here that what was actually judged (student attitude as perceived by the teacher) was not relevant to the construct (history learning) it claimed to measure. Second there is clearly a problem with my final grade not reflecting my actual achievement. This is contrary to recommendations for fair grading (O'Connor, 2003). It also seems that the teacher was abusing her power in decision-making, and using grades as punishment, which is not effective in motivating learners (Guskey, 2009).

References

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