Fall 9-14-2018

WAG Shares the DOPE: Tools for Effective Writing of Course Assignments International Writing Across the Curriculum Conference

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WAG Shares the DOPE: Tools for Effective Writing of Course Assignments
International Writing Across the Curriculum Conference
Auburn University, June 4-6, 2018
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WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

Introduction

Each of us received an Instructional Development Travel Grant to support our attendance at the 2018 International Writing Across the Curriculum Conference at Auburn University.

We facilitated a three-hour workshop the afternoon of June 6, 2018.

This workshop was an extension of work we have been doing in the College of Health and Human Services for the last 2 ½ years.

This work was originally supported by an Assessment Fellows Grant and focused on addressing assessment at the college level. To do that, we needed to focus on an area of competence that was relevant to all programs in the college. After reviewing the key goals that the college set back in 2005, and listening to colleagues on the college assessment committee, we decided to focus on the assessment of writing in the College of Health and Human Services.

From there, we led focus groups with faculty in the college, to discern what exactly they were looking for when it came to writing assignments in their courses. After all, we could not assess something if we did not first describe it.

The 'Aha' Moment

Purpose Think of this as motivation. Describe the problem a student may face in the real word to help the student see why it is important to do this assignment		
Objectives Use Bloom's Taxonomy to describe the outcome that you want to measure when the assignment is finished.		
Directions Describe the assignment		
Evaluation Describe the grading criteria for the assignment. This may be in the form of a rubric.		

Adapted from Yelon, S. (2001). *Goal-directed instructional design. A practical guide to instructional planning for teachers and trainers.* Michigan State University. Lansing, MI

After facilitating 5 focus groups, there was an "aha" moment. While most members of the focus groups were placing the responsibility for writing-related frustrations solely in the hands of the students, we began to realize that the model might be more complex. We also realized that while we had very little control over what students choose to bring to the process of writing, we could look at aspects over which we, as faculty, had control. That led to the review of writing assignments, rather than the output from students. Through this process, we found that some of our writing assignments had language that assumed knowledge, attitude or skills on the part of students that might not be present. From this, we developed a tool to aid us in the development of writing assignments. This tool is PODE, though we anagrammed it to DOPE for marketing our workshops.

WAG – Writing Assessment Group

Over the 2016-17 and 2017-18 academic years, we led 12 workshops in the College of Health and Human Services, designed to help faculty develop better writing assignments and learn other tools related to creating better writing experiences for our students. We introduced the PODE model, as well as spent time on formative and summative assessment, evaluation of assignments, feedback as a gift, and use of rubrics. We presented on PODE, rubrics, and feedback at the 2018 IWAC workshop.

Listed below are the objectives for our workshop:

Introduction to DOPE/PODE
Interactive and engaged participants
Outcomes include:
   Identify the different components of DOPE/PODE
   Recognize the role of rubrics in writing assignments
   Explain the role of feedback in writing assignments
   Describe the advantage of using a structured approach to developing writing assignments
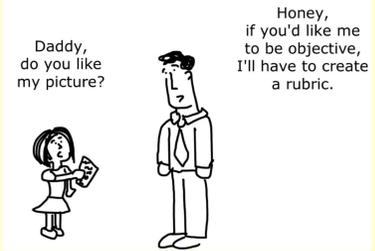
Interactive and Engaged Participants

We use active learning strategies in all our conference presentations, recognizing the importance of everyone being engaged and making the material interesting and useful.

One strategy we use is think/pair/share, where participants first process what they have experienced on their own, then discuss with one or two others, before sharing with the larger group.
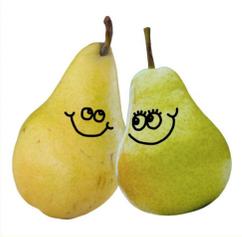
The Role of Rubrics

We introduce rubrics primarily as a way to give students additional guidance on what we expect from them in terms of outcomes. Rubrics also allow us to emphasize the relative importance of different parts of an assignment (e.g., % of points to a section) and to hold ourselves accountable for any reductions in points.

Daddy, do you like my picture?

Honey, if you'd like me to be objective, I'll have to create a rubric.

Feedback As A Gift

We see feedback as a gift that we give to our students. In that vein, it is important that we reflect on what it means to receive a gift. For example, most of us like a gift that is unique to us, not necessarily something generic that is given to everyone. We also like a gift that makes us feel good. While one approach is to focus on the negative or on penalties, research suggests that only negative feedback has the opposite of the intended impact, as students stop reading feedback if it is primarily negative in content.

BAD DOG!

COULD YOU BE MORE SPECIFIC

Evaluation

At the end of the workshop, we asked participants to reflect on the following questions:
- What was your biggest take-away from this workshop?
- Were there any surprises? If so, what were they?
- What activity from the workshop would you keep, and why?
- What activity from the workshop would you drop, and why?
- Any other feedback for the workshop facilitators?

Evaluation Results

Biggest take-away from workshop:
- Consistent structure; cycle of assess and revise assignments; role of effective rubrics

Any surprises from workshop:
- What I thought was clear could still be revised; taking a student perspective on assignment specifics; feedback as a gift

What activity from the workshop would you keep:
- Tips/discussion/rubrics made me think; how to communicate expectations; iterations of assignments

What Else Did We Do At IWAC 2018?

Workshop highlights:

Peer Review While Standing
Joseph Moses, University of Minnesota
• Used 1-minute paper
• Peer review for writing (pair-and-share technique)
• Used white boards (standing)
• Immediate feedback on writing skills

Teaching Teachers to Teach Writing
5 presenters from Santa Clara Univ & 1 from UC, Davis
- Data-driven project
- Training led to plan
- Students and faculty want dialogue and opportunity to bridge gaps
- Grant to build FLC

Meditation and Contemplative Composition: Informing Writing Instruction Across Disciplines
Mike Cook & Katharine Brown, Auburn University
- Use mindfulness practice to focus attention
- Provide direction for writing assignment
- Allow for reflective process within a contemplative model
- Assess output related to learning objectives
- Applicable for free writing in an English department, as well as more structured writing assignments in music education.

Future Impact from Attending IWAC 2018

We have submitted our work for publication in the edited collection, *Making Connections*, in honor of the 25th anniversary of IWAC.

We made connections with writing faculty and made possible connections for collaborative work.

We gathered materials to use in our 2018-19 Faculty Learning Community.

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