

2011-2012 College of Education Assessment Project Report

Purpose: This year, the faculty of the College of Education decided to direct our attention to an assessment of skill and attitude development in students taking EDUC461: Literacy Instruction, Assessment and Intervention and EDUC470: Content Area Literacy. One or the other of these classes is required for all students in the education program. Students in the Early Childhood and Elementary programs take EDUC461. Students in the Middle Level program and in Secondary education take EDUC470. For the majority of students, these classes represent the final education class taken prior to student teaching, so assessment of skills and attitudes in these classes represents an important form of summative assessment of these students.

Students were assessed in their basic knowledge and understanding of the skills and concepts taught in the course by use of an objective examination. Student attitudes regarding these skills and concepts were also assessed. It is impossible to be a successful classroom teacher unless the individual possesses both adequate skills and the confidence to successfully apply those skills with students.

A Pre-Test/Post-Test strategy was used for both assessments with the Pre-Test assessments occurring within the first two weeks of class. Post-Test assessments were taken after week 13 in a 15- week course. There were two sections of ED470 and one section of ED461.

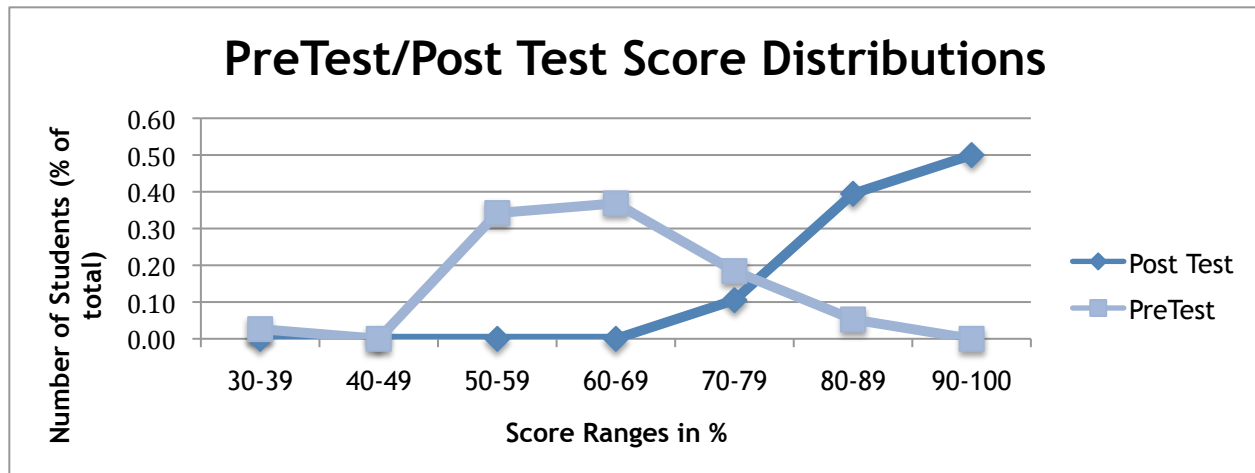
Part 1: Skills Assessment

Methodology: Students were assessed using a 30-item objective examination presented to them through their access to the Blackboard website for the class. The test items included a variety of factual and application questions presented in multiple-choice format. Students took the test independently and were given unlimited time to complete the test. Scores for the pre-test and post-test were not included in a student's grade for the course. Participation in the assessment was optional. Complete data pairs for 38 students were collected in the class.

For data analysis purposes, a benchmark score of 80% has been chosen as a threshold to separate student scores into groups, indicating a Pass/Fail evaluation of the results. Obviously, this can be seen as an arbitrary standard but it corresponds with minimum required grades to obtain a "C" in many education classes and allows for a simplified discussion of results.

Results: In the Pre-Test condition, only two of the 38 students (5%) attained a score equal to or higher than the minimum 80% threshold. The score range was from 37% to 87% with an average score of 62%. In the Post-Test condition, 34 of 38 students (89%) attained scores equal to or above the 80% threshold. Also, 19 students (50%) attained scores of 90% or higher. The score range was from 70% to 100% with an average score of 88%.

Conclusions: Scores on the objective assessment of skills indicates that increases in student knowledge of the skills and concepts were widespread and general. The great majority of the students demonstrated a level of knowledge that would be considered acceptable for a pre-professional student about to enter the classroom as a student teacher.



Part 2: Attitudes Assessment

Purpose: Our intent in assessing the attitudes of students was to determine the students' perceived level of familiarity and competency with the skills and strategies that are covered in the two classes. If the courses are having their desired effect, students will express greater familiarity with and confidence in using the skills and strategies covered in the courses.

Methodology: Again, a pre-test/post-test methodology was used. The first assessment was given at the same time as the objective assessment previously discussed, before the second week of class. The post-test attitudes assessment, like the skills assessment was given after Week 13 of a 15-week course.

Student attitudes regarding their feelings of “familiarity and competency” with certain educational skills were checked using 22 statements derived from the university’s Conceptual Framework and the goals and objectives of the courses. Those statements include:

1. Formatting and implementing an effective hook (anticipatory set).
2. Creating and teaching a main lesson that flows smoothly from hook to closure.
3. Determining what to assess in a lesson.
4. Determining which assessment tool to use.
5. Recording necessary data in a grade book or some other data source.
6. Incorporating vocabulary strategies throughout the lesson plan.
7. Fostering comprehension before, during, and after reading.
8. Providing appropriate scaffolding.
9. Differentiating instruction.
10. Finding alternatives to the traditional basal text.
11. Identifying an appropriate text based on text and reader factors.
12. Increasing motivation on the part of the students.
13. Evaluating instructional materials.
14. Organizing the classroom environment.
15. Using allocated time effectively during the lesson.
16. Redirecting improper student behavior (classroom management).
17. Addressing multiple literacies (visual, media, digital, etc.) within a single lesson plan.

18. Planning and teaching a unit.
19. Establishing a functional classroom schedule.
20. Ascertaining the appropriate standard for a specific lesson from the school, the district, the state, or professional discipline standards.
21. Developing a clear goal for a lesson.
22. Writing an objective in proper form.

Instructions for this component of the assessment were:

“Use the scale ...to indicate your feelings about your level of familiarity and competency for each of the tasks described:

Very familiar: Can be accomplished without significant problems.

Familiar: Could be accomplished effectively. Might need infrequent, occasional assistance.

Somewhat Familiar: Accomplished less effectively. Limited by lack of experience.

Recognize, but less familiar: Significant limits to my ability to accomplish this task.

Unfamiliar: I would not be able to accomplish this task without additional instruction or assistance.”

For data analysis purposes, numerical values from 5 (Very Familiar) to 1 (Unfamiliar) were assigned later but were not part of the instructions given to students. Students completed this assessment in the second week of the class and again after the 13th week of the course. Surveys were completed via the use of “Survey Monkey ®” linked to the Blackboard website for the course. Changes in the values attained in the assessment can be assumed to be largely related to experience of the courses under examination, but will also include changes due to individual experiences unrelated to the course.

Items that were rated either 5 or 4 (“Very Familiar: Can be accomplished without significant problems” or “Familiar: Could be accomplished effectively. Might need infrequent, occasional assistance) have been identified as “Satisfactory” responses in the analysis of the results. These responses represent statements by the students that indicate they feel they could make effective use of the concept or strategy in their classroom work. This is the level of competence and familiarity expected by the faculty in the College of Education. It is also consistent with other evaluation systems in use in the department where scores of “3” or lower (in this case “Somewhat Familiar”, “Recognize but less familiar”, and “Unfamiliar”) represent evaluations deserving of special attention and potential remediation. In this specific case, these evaluations would indicate that the student does not feel he or she could make effective use of the concept or strategy.

Results: In general, students demonstrated important improvements in their feelings of competency and familiarity during the course of the semester. In the first survey, 57.3% of the responses were in this “Satisfactory” range. That is, of the items proposed, students reported 57% of the time that they were “Very Familiar” or “Familiar” with the concept or strategy.

Students gave themselves much higher evaluations on some concepts and strategies than they did others. For example, “Formatting and implementing an effective hook (anticipatory set)” and “Developing a clear goal for a lesson” were rated at 5 or 4 for more than 75% of the students completing the evaluation. However, no concept or strategy was rated at a “satisfactory” level by more than 77% of the students. Other concepts and strategies, such as “Identifying an appropriate text based on text and reader factors” and “Ascertaining the

appropriate standard for a specific lesson from the school, the district, the state, or professional discipline standards” were rated at a satisfactory level by barely more than 25% of the students. On average, strategies and concepts were evaluated at a satisfactory level about 52% of the time.

At the conclusion of the course, ratings had changed dramatically. On average, students now rated themselves at a satisfactory level more than 92% of the time, with eight of 22 items receiving satisfactory evaluations more than 95% of the time. These are:

1. Formatting and implementing an effective hook (anticipatory set). (100%)
2. Creating and teaching a main lesson that flows smoothly from hook to closure. (97%)
6. Incorporating vocabulary strategies throughout the lesson plan. (97%)
10. Finding alternatives to the traditional basal text. (97%)
17. Addressing multiple literacies (visual, media, digital, etc.) within a single lesson plan. (97%)
18. Planning and teaching a unit. (97%)
21. Developing a clear goal for a lesson. (97%)
22. Writing an objective in proper form. (100%)

However, there are concepts and strategies that were still evaluated at an unsatisfactory level by a large number of students. Less than 90% of students rated themselves at a satisfactory level on seven different items. These are:

5. Recording necessary data in a grade book or some other data source. (81%)
7. Fostering comprehension before, during and after reading. (87%)
8. Providing appropriate scaffolding. (84%)
14. Organizing the classroom environment. (87%)
16. Redirecting improper student behavior (classroom management). (87%)
19. Establishing a functional classroom schedule. (87%)
20. Ascertaining the appropriate standard for a specific lesson from the school, the district, the state, or professional discipline standards. (87%)

It is important to note that of the items receiving less than 90% satisfactory evaluations, students rated three specific items especially low in the pre-test condition and the *net change* in evaluation from unsatisfactory to satisfactory levels were among the greatest changes in attitudes recorded in the survey. These items are:

10. Finding alternatives to the traditional basal text. (37% to 63% = Δ +26%)
11. Identifying an appropriate text based on text and reader factors. (34% to 65% = Δ +31%)
20. Ascertaining the appropriate standard for a specific lesson from the school, the district, the state, or professional discipline standards. (28% to 72% = Δ +44%)

It is also useful to note that of the items receiving lower self-evaluations from the students, five of the seven items are related to practical matters of class management:

5. Recording necessary data in a grade book or some other data source. (81%)
8. Providing appropriate scaffolding. (84%)
14. Organizing the classroom environment. (87%)

16. Redirecting improper student behavior (classroom management). (87%)
19. Establishing a functional classroom schedule. (87%)

Conclusions and Directions for Action

All in all, it seems that the large majority of students demonstrate that they have at least minimally attained adequate knowledge of the concepts and strategies presented in the class as demonstrated by the objective assessment present in the multiple-choice examination. They also *feel* as though they have adequate knowledge of the strategies and concepts taught in EDUC461 and EDUC470 and evaluated by this survey.

There are areas in which additional emphasis may be directed to assist in the development of student confidence and competence. One area that would seem to benefit from additional instruction is the area of classroom management. Anecdotal evidence indicates that this area is a major concern to students from the time they enter their first courses in education. While there is a large experiential component in learning how to manage a class that can only come from actually being in charge of students in an actual classroom additional efforts in EDUC461, EDUC470 and all of the courses in the educational core may serve to give students more confidence in this area.

Recommendations for Action: Because of the somewhat low numbers included in the data pool for this study, we will be repeating the study method in the coming academic year. Questions that can be addressed would include whether or not additional attention to classroom management issues would have an effect on the students' attitudes regarding their familiarity and competence with class management skills.