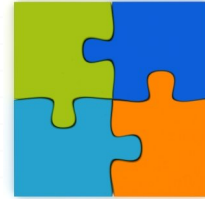


Stepping Up to Assessment

We put off thinking about assessment of events and programs for all kinds of reasons.

This session will be a chance to discuss common obstacles to assessment, identify steps for getting started, and consider whose interests are being served when we don't take steps to assess the programs we offer.



Four Central Propositions:

1. We are assessing all the time
2. No single assessment ever tells the whole story
3. We begin with our own questions about effects of our work
4. There will always be more to learn

Assessment in Higher Education


“The systematic collection of information ... using the time, knowledge, expertise, and resources available, in order to inform decisions about how to improve.”

Barbara Walvoord (2010),
Assessment Clear and Simple.




“Assessment, in essence, takes our natural curiosity about our work's effectiveness and puts it in a systematic framework, where we explicitly articulate what we hope [participants] ... will take away from the experience.”

Marilee Bresciani (2011), *Making Assessment Meaningful*.
Champaign, IL: National Institute for Learning Outcomes.



Assessment

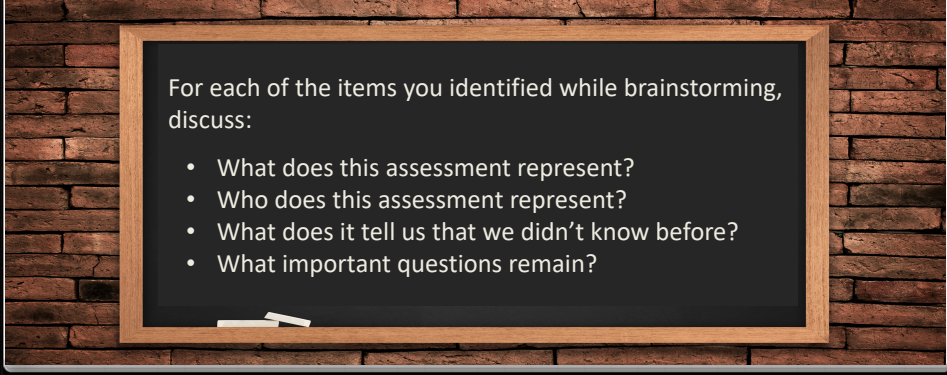
- ✓ To help examine programs in terms of their effects – what the effects are, how they are achieved, and who benefits
- ✓ To create a common point of reference for shared understanding and collaborative practice
- ✓ To increase transparency, allowing us to recognize expertise, build on successful practices, and make our stories known
- ✓ To demonstrate what we value



Proposition #1:
We are assessing all the time.

(using information to make decisions about what to do next)

Brainstorming Session: What sources of information do people typically use to make decisions about programs they are facilitating?



For each of the items you identified while brainstorming, discuss:

- What does this assessment represent?
- Who does this assessment represent?
- What does it tell us that we didn't know before?
- What important questions remain?

Proposition #2:
No single assessment ever tells the whole story



We may be assessing all the time, but ...

- Not always systematically
- Often unconsciously
- We usually don't know what our experiences and incidental observations represent.

Meanwhile

- We know that we mean well and we're trying really hard.
- We want our programs and participants to be successful.
- We tend to notice things that confirm our expectations or hoped-for outcomes.

Proposition #2:
No single assessment ever tells the whole story



Without intentional assessment, the story that gets told is the one that decision-makers are most predisposed to see.

"As a scholar practitioner, my goal is to structure assessment so that I can be sure I'm not simply seeing what I want to see or confirming my biases ..."

"We need to make a plausible case based on the evidence we have, demonstrating awareness of both what it can tell us and what it cannot, inviting constructive critical input on both the evidence and our conclusions."

Sharing Power and Privilege Through the Scholarly Practice of Assessment.
In S. Watt (2015), *Guiding Principles for Designing Transformative Multicultural Initiatives*.

Proposition #2:
No single assessment ever tells the whole story



Different forms of evidence used for assessment

Demonstration of a change or condition (“direct assessment”)

- Capturing examples of participants’ thinking or learning
- Observing examples of participants using or engaging with material

Perception of a change or condition (“indirect assessment”)

- Participant perceptions, feedback, or self-assessment
- Interviews, focus groups, surveys, documented reflections

The point is not that some forms of assessment are better or worse, but rather, to choose the form that best helps you answer your questions.

Proposition #3:
We begin with our own questions about effects of our work



What exactly do we hope to accomplish?

- Expressed in terms that are meaningful, observable, obtainable within the scope of the program or event
- What participants learn or do, rather than what facilitators intend or present



We are often motivated by large-scale, long-term visionary goals, even though most events operate on small-scale, short-term practical levels.

But when we assess near-term outcomes in terms of long-term goals, it is hard to see the effectiveness of an event on its own terms, and it always falls short.

Proposition #3:

We begin with our own questions about effects of our work



Possible ways to articulate hoped for outcomes:

- Terms of Success: On what basis would I want others to characterize quality of the program or event?
- If two participants come to an event with different backgrounds or purposes, how will they benefit from experiencing it together?
- What do I think is so important for participants to learn that, if I saw they weren't learning it, I would change what I'm doing?

Think of an event that you are planning or familiar with. Take 2 minutes to respond in writing to one of these questions, and 2 more minutes to discuss your writing with a colleague.

Proposition #3:

We begin with our own questions about effects of our work



Possible ways to identify forms of evidence to use for assessment:

- I'll know it when I see it – but what exactly am I hoping to see? What would I tell others to look for if they were trying something similar?
- If I want to be an advocate for the success of this event, how will I persuade others that I'm not just seeing what I want to see in it?
- What would I need to see in order to be persuaded that I should do something differently if I try this again in the future?

Take 2 minutes to use one of these questions to discuss the outcome you wrote about earlier.

Proposition #4:
There will always be more to learn



Because assessment is always partial, you can always broaden and deepen it ...

- More than one type of evidence
- More than one perspective represented in the evidence
- More than one point in time
- More than one audience acknowledged
- Becoming practically critical:
 - More systematic, transparent, participatory
 - More engagement with critical partners and allies



We find ourselves with limited data, which is inevitable because all data sources are limited, and then try to stretch the data to address questions that the assessment wasn't designed for.

Proposition #4:
There will always be more to learn



Or to put it another way, *the process does not end ...*

“Understandings and actions emerge in a constant cycle, one that highlights the ways in which [we] are partially correct, yet in continual need of revision, in [our] thoughts and actions ...

“The process does not end ... with richer understandings for others to implement; rather, it aids in an ongoing process of identifying contradictions, which in turn, help to locate spaces for ethically defensible, politically strategic actions.”

Susan Noffke & Robert Stevenson,
Educational Action Research: Becoming Practically Critical.
New York: Teachers College Press.