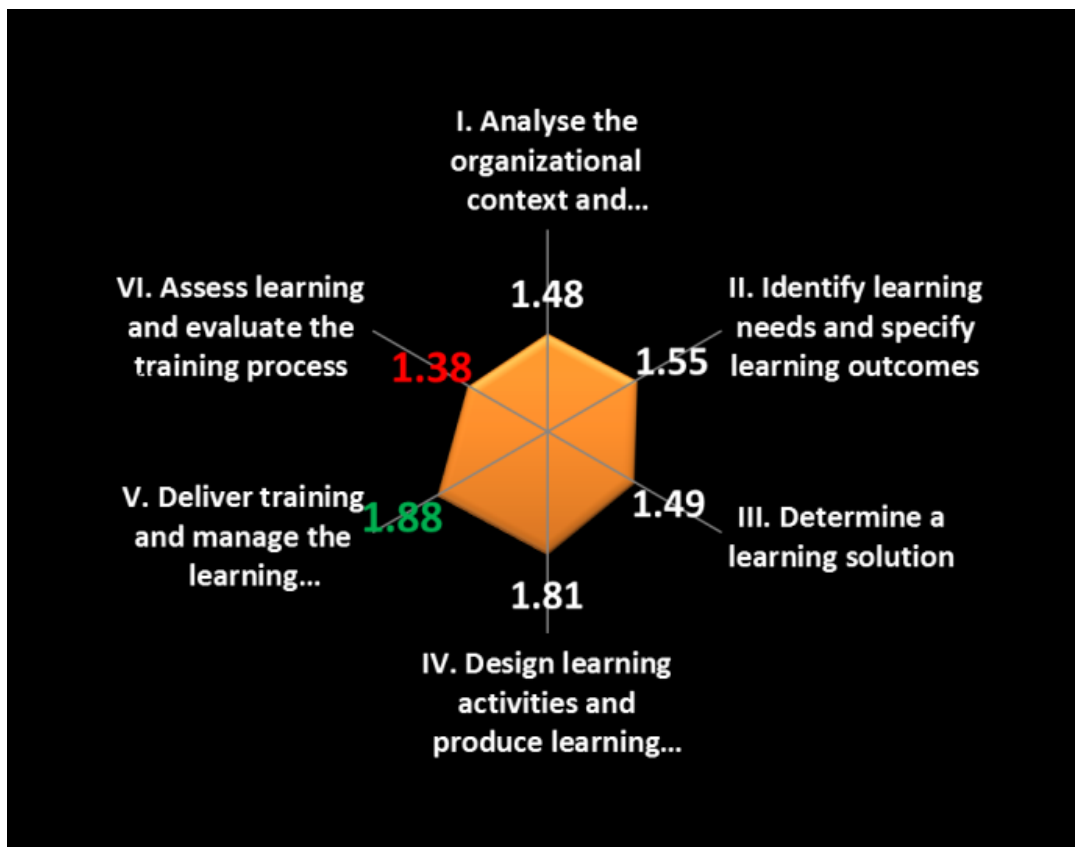


Assessment for Learning

Assessment is a process of collecting information about student learning that leads to educational decision making. It is a central part of a learning system.

Assessment is often seen as the most challenging part of the Training Cycle. The issue is assessment processes are not frequently taught. We often have the attitude that assessment is stressful and oppressive. But assessment should never be punitive, but aimed at enhancing learning through deeper student involvement. Existing practices of formative (within-course) and summative (end-of-course) assessment often need improvement, since their approaches often do not require deep cognitive processing, and may not be directly related to the stated learning objectives.

A Self-Assessment questionnaire used regularly in Course for Trainers results shows that *Assess learning and evaluate the training process* is among the weakest competencies as self-assessed by participants.



2015 Questionnaire results

Hattie (2003) has identified five major dimensions of excellent teachers. He suggests that expert teachers

- ☞ can identify essential representations of their subject,
- ☞ can guide learning through classroom interactions,
- ☞ **can monitor learning and provide feedback,**
- ☞ can attend to affective attributes, and
- ☞ **can influence student outcomes.**

Effective teaching not only involves providing constructive tasks, environments, and information about the subject, but also involves assessing and evaluating students'

understanding of this information so that the next teaching act can be matched to the present understanding of the students (Hattie and Timperley, 2007).

“Students can survive (with difficulty) poor teaching, but they can’t escape the effects of poor assessment” (Boud, 1995)

The goals of Assessment must be set at the beginning and aligned to the required learning outcomes. Assessment must be central to the curriculum design. Students should be provided an Assessment Guide from the very beginning as well. The assessment process can't be changed within the course; otherwise it might harm its flow and outcomes.

Performance has changed over the years!

- Nowadays, a key skill is the ability to locate and apply knowledge quickly and efficiently. “Answers” are readily available with technology—we no longer need hours of research.
- Students are expected to communicate ideas effectively, not just pass tests.
- It is the age of information, not rote tasks.
- There is no longer one definitive source of information (including the teacher)

Are assessments keeping up with these new performance conditions? The choice of assessment must consider the learning objectives and what it is you wish to assess. Always ask yourself: “Is this the most appropriate method to validly measure the learning objectives?”

Principles of Assessment

Griffith University offers 8 principles of assessment on their “Assessment Matters” site at <http://app.griffith.edu.au/assessment-matters//docs/design-assessment/principles>



In other words, assessment should provide equal opportunity for success (fair), address the learning objectives (appropriate), demonstrate achievement of the objectives (valid), consistent (reliable), understandable by learners (transparent), relevant to the working world (authentic), of the right scope (manageable), and be something that learners will want to spend time on (engaging).

Formative Assessment and Feedback

Today, the educational uses and purposes of assessment focus on the idea that **assessment can contribute to improving students’ learning** (through practice) **and teachers’ teaching** (through feedback) (Newton, 2007). Formative assessment (within-course) is an efficient tool to achieve both goals. Formative assessment has recently become a focus of renewed research as it was realized that summative assessments have reached a point of diminishing returns as a tool for increasing student achievement (Handbook of Formative Assessment, 2010).

Thus, the focus shifts from assessment of learning to assessment **for** learning.

“If educational measurement doesn’t lead to better education for students, then we shouldn’t be doing it.” (J. Popham, 2000)

Insufficiently carried out Formative Assessment and poorly provided Feedback decrease learning outcomes. **Feedback means providing information on how and why the learner understands and misunderstands, and what directions s(he) must take to improve.**

In “Visible Learning: a synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement” (2009), J. Hattie presents research results that demonstrate Feedback to be the most effective teaching technique and predictor of learning.

Hattie and Timperley (2007) identify three major questions that can be answered through feedback processes:

- **Where am I going?**
- **How am I going?**
- **Where to next?**

Hattie, (2009), declares that it is a mistake to consider feedback as something only teachers provide to students (such feedback is often social and behavioral). **Feedback is most powerful when it is from the student to the teacher.** When teachers seek, or, at least, are open to feedback from students regarding what students know, what they understand, where they make errors, when they have misconceptions, and when they are not engaged – then teaching and learning can be synchronized and powerful. Feedback to teachers helps to make learning visible.

In other words, an ideal learning environment or experience occurs when both teachers and students seek answers to each of three questions above.

References

Boud, D. Assessment and learning: contradictory or complementary? In P. Knight (Ed.) *Assessment for Learning in Higher Education*. 1995. London: Kogan Page, pp. 35-48.

Handbook of Formative Assessment. 2010. New York, NY: Routledge.

Hattie, J. A. *Teachers Make a Difference: What is the research evidence?* Australian Council for Educational Research Annual Conference on: Building Teacher Quality. October 2003.

Hattie, J. A. *Visible Learning; a synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement*. 2009. Routledge. pp. 378.

Hattie, J. A. and Timperley, H. *The Power of Feedback* / *Review of Educational Research*. 77(1), 2007. p. 88.

The online version of this article can be found <http://rer.sagepub.com/content/77/1/81>

Newton, P. E. *Clarifying the purposes of educational assessment* / *Assessment in Education* Vol. 14, No. 2, July 2007, pp. 149–170.

Popham, W.J. *Modern Educational Measurement: Practical guidelines for educational leaders*. 2000. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.