# Improvement of Instruction and Curriculum Planning:

# Post-Assessment

1. **What is learning? (What is evidence of learning?)**

In my own words, learning is the process of acquiring or improving skills or knowledge. In the classroom, learning is often measured with respect to an individual or a whole class learning goal. However, because learning is a process, it cannot be assessed using a single test or paper. These types of “snapshot” assessments only tell what the students know at that time. When used alone, they do not tell whether a student is or has been learning. Improvement is the key component of learning. This can only be observed over time and with multiple, and ideally frequent, assessments.

There are many ways for teachers to see evidence of learning. Written or oral formal assessments are traditionally what are used as evidence of learning. However, evidence of learning can also be found by observing students in discussion. For example, witnessing a student having an Aha! moment is clear evidence of learning. Students who are able to make inferences about, analyze, and critique content-related material are showing clear evidence of learning. When students are able to put things into their own words, they are also showing evidence of learning. Because students that are not learning are likely to become bored or frustrated, an on-task student is evidence of learning.

1. **What factors affect student learning?**

There are many things that influence student learning, such as a students' background knowledge and home-life. However, teachers can directly control many other factors. I am going to focus factors that teachers have significant control over.

One factor that influences a students' learning is whether they hold an entity view or an incremental view of intelligence (Dweck). Those who have an entity view believe their intelligence is fixed. These students will avoid challenges (which are critical to learning) to avoid “looking dumb.” Those who have an incremental view, believe that intelligence improve over time. These students are much more likely to take on a challenge simply because it is a learning opportunity. Whether a student is of the helpless mindset or the mastery-oriented mindset will also affect their learning similarly. A helpless response to difficulty will impair students' ability to think and solve problems effectively. Students who display a mastery-oriented response will thrive in challenging situations.

The study conducted by Rosenthal and Jacobson (Marzano, Chapter 9, p 163) shows the huge impact of high teacher expectations on student learning. Students whom teachers were told would make significant increases in their academic performance that year did in fact make significant improvements, as shown by an IQ test. Junior's thoughts about his coach and teammates also reflect the impact of high expectations. “They expected me to be good. And so I became good [...] As they expected more of me, I expected more of myself” (Alexie, p 180). The consequences of having low expectations are severe as well. “Children know when they are being treated differently from other children and it takes a powerful toll on their motivation to learn” (Carolyn Holbrook, Low Expectations are the Worst Form of Racism, p 253). Marzano discusses specific behaviors that communicate high expectations students. These behaviors include smiling, making eye contact, giving positive specific feedback, and engaging in humorous dialogue.

According to Wong and Wong, classroom management is the single most important factor in student learning (Wong and Wong, p 80). Classroom management refers to how a teacher organizes student behavior, time, and materials to maximize student learning. Marzano also agrees that classroom management is critical to effective instruction (Chapters 6 and 7). The importance of classroom management is logical. The less time spent on non-academic procedures and behavioral problems, the more time there is for learning to take place.

1. **How do I use theory to inform my practice and effectively affect student learning?**

Although theory and research cannot provide teachers with techniques that will be effective with *every* student, they can tell teachers which techniques have a high probability of being effective with most students. It is important to keep theory in mind both when planning instruction and when “doing” instruction. For example, classroom management policies need to be planned in advance, and communicating high standards to all students (as discussed in the previous question) is something that teachers must be thinking about *during* instruction. Teacher-designed tasks take up 60-70 percent of class time (Marzano, Chapter 10) and therefore play a large role in student learning. There are several theories from this course that I would particularly like to apply in the future.

Dweck's writings on helpless vs. mastery-oriented students provide strategies for fostering mastery-oriented responses in students. Teachers should praise students' effort and strategies, not just their results. Teachers should have (and communicate) learning goals instead of performance goals for their students. It is also beneficial for students to create their own learning goals (Marzano, Chapter 1). Teachers can influence whether students have an entity or a fixed intelligence theory. Teaching students the entity intelligence theory can foster a mastery-oriented response. In my content area, this could be done during a section on the nervous system by teaching students about how neurons are constantly making new connections and how this relates to learning.

I agree with Marzano that engaging students is critical for their learning and academic achievement (Chapter 5). Engagement must be considered both when planning instruction and during instruction. Engaging activities must be planned into lessons ahead of time. During class, teachers must constantly monitor their students' levels of engagement and make changes to their teaching when engagement is low. One sign that a student is engaged is that they are asking questions. This is particularly true if their questions are above the knowledge level in Bloom's taxonomy. Marzano refers to engagement at on task behavior. The key to keeping students on task is that they are motivated. Some of the best ways to motivate students include high teacher enthusiasm, puzzles, games, student-made goals, and competition. Connecting class material to students' interests will also increase their motivation.

I would not be able to apply these theories if I had not studied them. Because new research is being published all the time, it is important to stay current with this information. I must challenge myself to continue reading journal articles and books that are relevant to education and teaching now and throughout my career.

Works Cited

Carol Dweck. Self-Theories: Their role in motivation, personality, and development

Carolyn Holbrook. Low Expectations are the Worst Form of Racism (from White Teachers/Diverse Classrooms, Julie Landsman and Chance Lewis)

Harry and Rosemary Wong. The First Days of School

Robert Marzano. The Art and Science of Teaching

Sherman Alexie. The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian