



Assessment for Rapid Pedagogical Improvement (ARPI) Showcase



Daniel Perez

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Prepared by Karen White-Goyzueta
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Team Members
Karen White-Goyzueta
Yao Zhang Hill
Yan Cooksey

Context

Daniel Perez is an instructor in the English Department at Texas Southmost College. The college is a public comprehensive 2-year college in Texas, enrolling more than 8,000 students. Mr. Perez teaches English General Education courses to predominantly Hispanic students. These courses are designed to establish a foundation for the General Education pathway into an associate degree.

In the English Composition course, Mr. Perez stated that the most important opportunity for students was to learn intensive study of and practice in the strategies and techniques for developing research-based expository and persuasive texts. The students learn effective and ethical rhetorical inquiry, including primary and secondary research methods; critical reading of verbal, visual, and multimedia texts; systematic evaluation, synthesis, and documentation of information sources; and critical thinking about evidence and conclusions. The major takeaway from the course is the use of a Signature Assignment. This was the greatest tool that the faculty used for student learning and success.

Assessment Strategies for Rapid Improvement

Mr. Perez implemented most of his teaching through the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) after the 2019 SACSCOC Accreditation. Mr. Perez focused on metacognitive strategies in the courses which were used to assist the students with completing their Signature Assignment. For Mr. Perez, developing their growth as thinkers was magic as was teaching the students how the embedded metacognitive activities in the composition course helped them become better problem-solvers. It was important to help students learn how to understand metacognition and connect their learning to the overall goals of the course.

Mr. Perez used critical aspects of teaching the course are scaffolding, low stake assessments, and the discussion with the English department about quality assignments versus quantity of assignments. Mr. Perez advised that the English faculty found that bombarding students with so many assignments with technically high stakes was causing students to feel overwhelmed, especially when juggling other courses. The English department discovered that they were product oriented as opposed to process oriented.

The greatest part of teaching English and Composition is planning. Mr. Perez advised that *“Organizing your thoughts, thinking about what you’re going to say as opposed to just writing because you need to write, and figuring out what you want to say within the writing were the hardest parts of teaching.”* As an English instructor, Mr. Perez can tell you where the comma splice goes or other grammar and punctuations are necessary. The concern is the students knowing what to write and who you are writing for.

Because the Mr. Perez is serving a predominately Hispanic student population, there are several challenges in moving students to perform successfully in their courses. He stated that there is a great divide between the ESL learner and the native speaker as it relates to the nature of the community that they live in. There appears to be many different dialect speakers who fall into a third camp because they don’t have a foundation of either English or Spanish. These students fall sort of in the middle and the discussion at Texas Southmost College has to do with the reality that they face as it relates to having a

foundation in one language. Mr. Perez advised that this school space is where if you have a foundation in one language, it is easier to learn another language because you have something to compare it to. However, when you have no foundation or formation in either language that is particularly strong, the student will find themselves in a kind of “*no man’s land.*”

Mr. Perez asked, “*What does the data tell us? How are we identifying these populations? How do we support them successfully?*” He advised that opinions would be anecdotal and theoretically biased for formative assessment. Mr. Perez did assume that he may hold a bias against the ESL learner and dialect speaker yet focuses only on the native speaker, which is what he considers a sort of challenge. The data showed that they were not doing the right work, being responsible for the loops or conversations, nor being equitable. Therefore, when it came to assessment, Mr. Perez advised that they had to identify these different populations to determine how to successfully support them equitably.

Pedagogical Interventions

Mr. Perez examines what he believes is the most effective formative assessments which are low stakes and no stakes assignments. He advised that students believe that there is “one right answer” and this answer will give them an “A” even though the whole point of a community college is to teach enough information that students learn more about the course content. However, teachers can sometimes become judgmental and students become afraid of the English department and that judgement is reflected in the number of high-stakes assignments, which gives faculty numerous opportunities to lift or bury their students academically. This is why assessment becomes so important. Mr. Perez advised that among the ten (10) worst performing courses on the campus, nothing changes; -Composition I and II are usually a part of those worst performing courses, because emphasis has been on improving the pass rate rather than improving the student learning experience, but that is beginning to change.

When implementing pedagogical interventions, Mr. Perez advised that because of the different levels of responsibility for the vast array of students, he must look at his pedagogical interventions in a way that served the silent population. For instance, Mr. Perez knew about students that had jobs and were not always there in class yet he worked with them by having the students feel empowered to simply reach out to him and complete their work as required. Ultimately, Mr. Perez stated that “*We must not allow those potential obstacles to interfere with their end goal which is attaining a college degree. Whether my students are homeless or not, I made sure that whatever they needed to complete their work in my classroom, it was provided.*”

Mr. Perez made it clear that pedagogical interventions should be at the level of student needs as much as at the point of making sure the coursework is taught. As a result, Mr. Perez shared that the story behind each of his students was as important as teaching the course material. He advised that the college’s Learning Center and tutoring lab are used to assist students. As a deconstructionist, Mr. Perez attempts to understand who his students are and where they are coming from, which helps him immensely as a facilitator of learning.

Mr. Perez teaches his course face-to-face and hybrid with online lectures. The improvement that he made in teaching and assessment can be categorized into two types: rapid and sustained changes.

The **rapid changes** happen in response to the formative assessment methods during the class time which revealed a particular area of learning gap or confusion. Mr. Perez provides intricate teacher responses to students that assist students with correcting their thought process in understanding the course materials.

The **sustained changes** happen when the course is completed and Mr. Perez would go back and review questions to better align with the discussion and written assignments. He would take additional time to systematically analyze the written results, understand better where students struggle, and identify the parts of the lecture and teaching materials can be improved, incorporate additional readings or resources into the syllabi or course materials for the next semester, sustaining the improvement made in the current semester to the next semester.

Examples that Mr. Perez provided for the sustained changes include:

- Scaffolding learning through multiple short assignments throughout the semester so that he can give students prompt feedback.
- Using the formative assessment and group activities for rapid improvement of pedagogy. For example, using fifteen (15) minutes of the classroom time to reteach materials that the students struggled with.
- During the formative assessment activities, solicit feedback from students on the assessment methods and the outcomes of their completion of these assessments.
- Self-reflection of teaching methodology to improve his teaching skills in preparation for the next semester.

Equity Considerations

Mr. Perez advised that his student population was 99.5% Hispanic. As a result of this heavily Hispanic student population, his formative and summative assessment practices were implemented within a culture context. Mr. Perez stated, *“Math is one of the key indicators of student successful completion of a degree but that doesn’t mean that English has no impact on them.”* Therefore, Mr. Perez advised that scaffolding two or three essays and giving the students low-stake assignments was an equitable consideration.

Mr. Perez advised that the students have begun to understand and become open to assessment as an equitable process. Mr. Perez advised *“A little bit of data can transform a department in good ways as opposed to threatening the faculty”* and this was a plus in the Hispanic culture. Furthermore, he advised that the use of data to understand and empower faculty became a forwarding momentum. The English faculty were engaged in assessment when viewing it from an assessment perspective.

Mr. Perez encourages metacognition as a strong assessment tool. He advised that metacognition training is beneficial as it reminds faculty that we never stop learning, even if you possess a terminal degree. Mr. Perez believes that the biggest principle of metacognition is equity and he found that deconstructive techniques improve equity-centered pedagogy. In addition, equity is seen in how he helps students enter his classroom and become better informed people. Mr. Perez stated, *“My job is to*

help whoever comes to my classroom, regardless of who they are, what their background is, where they come from, or what their educational background is, to succeed."

Mr. Perez advised that he recognizes his need to be better informed as a person about what his possible limitations and biases are, with respect to the classroom, and what he expects in Composition I. He attempts to be very student-centered and pays close attention to the preconceived notions of writing that students enter his classroom with. Mr. Perez believes that equity is about helping students understand that their educational aspirations should become audience awareness. Then the English course becomes a unit of equity, not just a course needed to graduate.

Personal and Institutional Factors to Effect Change

At the personal level, Mr. Perez believes that his professional career has informed his teaching. Prior to working in education, he worked for The University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College (UTB/TSC). This experience facilitated and guided his learning strategies in the Learning Center and tutoring lab. As opposed to being an instructor expecting specific things from his students, he took a quasi-tutor role mindset and helped his students understand what was going on in the classroom and how they could work together.

Mr. Perez stated, *"Sometimes as academics, we find ourselves in situations as being sort of judges or arbiters of things, as opposed to facilitators of learning."* In a new department where Communication and Language are now under Humanities, the faculty has begun to look at what challenges are in their courses. He stated that the metacognition training assisted them in seeing how they had become ossified in the fields of study. With the combination of these departments, Mr. Perez advised that the Chair is providing a good sounding board for all the faculty to talk to and through ideas. The Chair is very open to faculty members trying different things to see if the faculty can motivate students and improve student performance.

Mr. Perez believes that the institution's decision to combine the departments was a good idea. The faculty was able to attend various professional development opportunities together, which has become an important element of learning. This has changed the mindset of faculty and has inclined them to begin to look at the problems concerning the students as not only theirs, but also faculty. He advised that the community college model is that faculty look at the pain that the students go through to meet them in these challenging times and engage the students in conversations that mirror and remind them of what is important.

Mr. Perez advised that one of the biggest challenges is that the faculty do not want to adopt any of the new things brought to them. The faculty does not want to make changes in their classroom without having made the decisions themselves as they see this as more work. However, Mr. Perez stated, *"I do not see this as more work, I see this as working differently."* Not only do some faculty not want to revisit their coursework, they also do not want to see that tenure position should not stop them from seeing a different way the student is attempting to respond to them.

Mr. Perez advised, *“Academic freedom has nothing to do with what you teach but how you teach it.”* This is the major challenge for faculty that have years of experience and in some cases, may be retiring in a few years. Ultimately, the biggest challenge for the institution is the different spaces that faculty sit in such as early adopters, middle group, and tenure. Mr. Perez advised that if the conversations could be seen as an institutional talk, it would be more well received as faculty might pull together.

Mr. Perez mentioned that he felt the institution was sometimes behind in providing the appropriate professional development. According to Mr. Perez, the institutional administrators do not fully understand the faculty’s work in assessment. He recommends that administrators should teach at least one course. The administrators would learn about assessment and begin to understand the importance of scaffolding, low stake assessments, and metacognitive strategies.

Takeaways

- Clear alignment between assessment, learning objectives, and teaching content make rapid and sustained changed logical and streamlined.
- The correct use of assessment will greatly impact your teaching methodology.
- The formative assessment process leads to questioning your current teaching and learning methodology.
- Assessment is there to help, not hurt, the learning process. It provides meaningful changes in the classroom.