



Assessment for Rapid Pedagogical Improvement (ARPI) Showcase



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Glendale Community College, AZ

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Context

Dr. Julie Morrison is a professor of psychology at Glendale Community College, AZ. One of the courses that she teaches is Research Methods in Psychology, a capstone course in psychology that is accompanied by an intensive lab course. Students taking this course are in their final year of study and are ready to transfer to a 4-year college or university.

In this course, Dr. Morrison's overarching goal is to train students to conduct scientific inquiry and critically evaluate research. In addition, students are expected to write an APA style report, design and carry out a research study from beginning to the end, and gain knowledge of different research methods.

Dr. Morrison used a flipped classroom model: students watch the lecture recording and complete a guided note manual prior to coming to the class. During the class time, students discuss what they have learned and carry out a variety of enrichment activities. In the lab, students design, implement, write up, and present a research project.

Assessment Strategies for Rapid Improvement

Dr. Morrison used a myriad of assessment tools in her course.

First of all, she implemented an impressive array of formative assessment tasks:

- **Guided Note Manual.** This is the lecture notes with some open-ended blanks/questions for students to complete as they listen to the homework lecture.
- **1-minute digital paper.** Before the class, students write down the most important or interesting ideas that they learned from the lecture and the questions that they still have in a Google Doc. They are also asked to connect their learning to their prior knowledge.
- **Comprehension Quiz.** Students work in small groups to answer questions related to the lecture material. Each student is able to submit their own quiz if they disagree on the answers. Points of confusion are addressed during this process as well as used to guide how time is spent on the enrichment activities.

Dr. Morrison also uses multiple summative assessment tools including culminating products:

- **Student independent writing of each section of a research paper** (e.g., literature review, research design) and self-assessment. Students self-assess how well they completed the task by completing a Google Form that provides a checklist of all the steps to take and the content to include for completing a particular written task.
- **An article critique task as the final exam.** Students need to identify 5 major flaws in the methodology and claims in a published scientific paper and describe how they would use their research knowledge to solve these problems by "weaving in the concepts" from the books and lectures, using correct citation and appropriate terminologies.
- **Pre- and post tests of APA knowledge.**

In addition to learning assessment instruments, Dr. Morrison also uses:

- A personal observation and reflection log and

- student course evaluation and feedback to guide her reflection and improvement of the course.

The summative assessment results demonstrate that the course has a high positive impact on student learning. The final exam, done by students on their own, is particularly telling of students' knowledge and skills to critically evaluate research. Additionally, students present their research in a public poster presentation, with some students taking their projects to the Western Psychological Association convention. Students present with such a sense of pride of accomplishing a complete research study in one-semester's time. Through keeping contact with her former students on Facebook and emails, Dr. Morrison learns the lasting positive impact of the course on their students as students report back to her how they have used what they learned in their academic, professional, and personal life.

Pedagogical Interventions

Dr. Morrison is a responsive, reflective, and highly conscientious educator who makes three types of changes to her pedagogy:

- **Rapid reactive changes to remediate learning confusions and gaps.** Dr. Morrison performs timely analysis of students' formative assessment tasks to understand areas of learning confusion:
 - She reads through students completed note manuals and 1-minute papers to identify the common areas of confusion and where individual students struggle.
 - She analyzes quiz responses, identifying the questions that are frequently answered incorrectly. She would check whether the questions were poorly written and then identify the "consistent place" where students have struggled.
 - When observing group discussions, she notes down areas of common confusion.
 - She analyzes students' self-assessment of the writing task to identify the common steps/content that students are not doing well and what each individual student needs help with.

Based on these observations, qualitative and quantitative analysis, Dr. Morrison makes on-the-spot changes in the class or in the upcoming class session to provide **further clarifications, examples, and explanations.**

- **Sustained changes that last from one semester to the next.** To decide what pedagogical changes made in this semester to keep for the next semester and how to further refine the course, Dr. Morrison uses assessment data, student evaluation, and a personal reflection log to assist with the decision.
 - Dr. Morrison carries out item analysis on multiple-choice quiz items and pre- and post tests. She also analyzes rubric scores in depth to investigate students' learning of the intended course learning outcomes and specific learning areas. Her analysis leads to the revision of the assessment instrument and identification of particular areas of learning to enhance for the next time around.
 - End-of-course student evaluation is where Dr. Morrison uses students' feedback to identify activities to keep or refine.
 - Most importantly, Dr. Morrison keeps a very detailed log of the classroom activities for each lesson for each semester. The log records her class activities, her observation and

reflection of what worked well and what doesn't, the assessment results, and notes for how she would make changes for the future. After each lesson, she completes her documentation, and after each semester, she reviews her notes and makes decisions on changes to make for the next time around.

Over the years, through reflection and documentation, Dr. Morrison has created an inventory of pedagogical activities for each area that students are struggling with. Then for the unique challenges faced by a particular cohort or individual students, she can readily respond by selecting an activity from her log.

- **Structural changes** that affect the learning environment of the course. While formative assessment leads to reactive changes and end-of-course analysis and reflection brings in proactive changes, the most informed and profound changes that Dr. Morrison brings to her class seem to come from her own professional learning of curriculum design through attending formal training and interaction with colleagues. The training that made great impact on her teaching include:
 - [Universal Design for Learning \(UDL\)](#) for making the class culturally sensitive, eliminating biases, building structure of support for students
 - [Transparency in Learning & Teaching \(TILT\)](#) for scaffolding learning and having detailed and clear instructions
 - [Peralta Equity Rubric](#) training for how to support students through technology

Equity Considerations

“Leaving nothing to chance” is an operating principle that Dr. Morrison holds when carrying out her teaching and assessment. She designed her course for student success in learning. Leaving nothing to chance means that students do not need to do guess work and “being very, very explicit of what they need.” As long as students complete the work with proficiency, they will get an A in the course and almost every student does.

Through training in TILT and the Peralta Equity Rubric, Dr. Morrison **helps students with different academic experiences to learn** through making the instructions explicit, scaffolding learning by breaking down the tasks into smaller bites and providing individualized support.

Take the writing task for example. Instead of asking students to write an entire research paper, she assigns independent writing of each section of the paper (e.g., literature review, research design). Below are how she scaffolds successfully completion of the task:

- Organize brainstorming of content and outline of the writing in small groups. For example, the group may summarize one article together to use a model for individual work done later.
- Provides a writing guide that functions as a worksheet that includes concrete steps and actions to take for completing the task (e.g., put the required information below in bullet points, provide an outline, describe topic 1)
- Have students self-assess their writing using the checklist on a Google Form as a reminder of what they need to do to complete the writing. Those who complete the checklist will have 24 hours more to submit the work.
- Encourage students to consult with her in in-person meetings.

- Give students the choice to meet with her to revise the paper after the grades are given and get up to half of the lost credits back.

Honoring students' identities. At the beginning of the class, Dr. Morrison encourages students to share the multifacets of their identities and pronouns with her but gives them the choice of not to share.

To **address students' mental health needs and challenges**, she does a weekly check-ins with students using an activity called "six-word Memoirs" — students summarize their story of the past week in six words, such as "it was my friend's birthday," or "my dog passed away." The sharing helps Dr. Morrison understand where students are and how to interact with them. Students can use the phrase "rough sea" to indicate that they were experiencing a difficult time and Dr. Morrison would give the student more "space and grace." She would check in with the student later and offer to connect them with resources on campus.

She has students who are differently abled and will **make the accommodations needed**, for whatever that situation may be.

Dr. Morrison tries to provide **equitable assessment conditions and accommodate students needing support in language skills and those in academic writing skills**:

- Making herself available in both the content course and the lab course. Encouraging students to meet her to receive individualized support and receive feedback on their writing.
- Making her assignments highly structured with detailed instructions, templates, checklists, and example. Give students explicit instructions and expectations. Again, leaving nothing to chance.
- Breaking up the daunting research paper writing task into small steps. Model each step with examples: *"I am going to tell you exactly everything you need to tell me back."*
- She also asks students' feedback on the rubric: *"how understandable was this rubric?"* to see whether the rubric makes sense to the students.

Personal and Institutional Factors to Effect Change

Dr. Morrison's teaching philosophy is that teaching should be tailored to student needs. Through her skillful use of assessment and pedagogical tools, she is able to tell what students know, what they don't, what they can do, and what they cannot. Dr. Morrison is highly adaptive and adjustable to students' needs. She is capable of making rapid pedagogical changes.

Dr. Morrison is dedicated to classroom teaching and strongly pursues teaching excellence. She left teaching in a 4-year university and chose to teach in a community college because the environment allows her to concentrate her time and energy on teaching. She actively seeks out professional development and training to attend and apply her learning to refine teaching practice. Dr. Morrison is open to share, collaborate, and exchange ideas with colleagues both in the department and through professional support groups.

Her strong quantitative and qualitative research skills and her skill in conducting item analysis certainly help her to be an adept assessment user.

Dr. Morrison is an avid reflective professional who regularly and carefully documents her teaching practice and reflection, which helps her to sharpen her teaching skills and build a pedagogy repository.

Dr. Morrison considers the following department and institutional conditions to help her make pedagogical changes:

- The community college setting provides dedicated time for instructors to focus on teaching.
- Her department has a collaborative working environment. She can talk to colleagues about teaching challenges and can expect them to collaboratively problem-solve. She loves the co-teaching experience and learns from colleagues what they do in class.
- Her Center for Teaching, Learning, and Engagement provides extensive resources to support teaching.
- The institution values professional development and provides travel funds and pay raises for participating in professional development.
- The institution has a regular reporting requirement that facilitates instructor's reflection on teaching with questions such as: *What course have you really worked on to improve? How have you done it?*

For someone who has been very successful in implementing pedagogical improvements, Dr. Morrison still recognizes its challenge amid busy day-to-day teaching for any instructor. The additional support that she hopes for is resources and personnel who can help students with unrealistic expectations (e.g., "I should get an A in all my assignments," "whatever I need you should be here for") so that instructors can focus their time and energy on teaching, rather than mediating conflicts.

Takeaways

Dr. Morrison shares three major takeaways from her experience for other instructors who aim to gain skills in making pedagogical improvements:

- Carve out time and space for teaching reflection. She considers the habit of documenting and reflecting on teaching through a teaching log is a "game changer."
- Engage in continuous professional development to the extent possible.
- Find your community of support. Dr. Morrison joined a teaching of psychology Facebook group, in which she asks questions to peers and answers questions from others. This group serves as her primary community of support.

Resources

Sample Research Report: [Is Honesty the Best Policy?](#)

[Sample Six Word Memoirs Activity](#)

Teaching is a reflective practice: [Sample Teaching Reflection Report](#)