Deep Dialogue Discussion Summary

Introduction

In fall 2013, the Vice President of Academic Affairs extended invitations to all full-time faculty members to participate in what were called Deep Dialog Discussions, ten in total, throughout the fall 2013 semester. Participants met with VP Michael Allen in the Academic Affairs conference room for about 90 minutes in small groups of 4-8 faculty members. Members of each group of faculty attendees were chosen randomly and represented all Academic departments and disciplines across campus. An Academic Affairs secretary was present as note-taker to document discussions. Faculty attendees were encouraged to speak freely and share any ideas from the discussion with other faculty members if they so chose.

There was a brief agenda, commencing with the VP’s introduction of the subject of Authentic Assessment along with distribution of two items for faculty consideration: a PowerPoint by the Academic Senate of the California Community Colleges titled “What is Authentic Assessment”; and an article by Jon Mueller titled “Authentic Assessment Toolbox”. A third article, “The Myth of Learning Styles,” by Cedar Riener and Daniel Willingham, was distributed towards the end of the meeting to initiate future discussions among faculty about whether the theory of Learning Styles is a valid one and useful in pedagogy or a myth, as the article suggests. The VP asked each group to designate someone to organize the faculty members present to meet together about once a month for discussion of these and other issues focused on teaching, pedagogy and authentic assessment. The goal of these future meetings is to learn from one another, provide encouragement, and share ideas for improving their own teaching skills.

Discussions

The VP initiated a discussion to compare traditional assessment tools, such as written exams, to authentic assessments, which have real-world applications. The faculty members spoke of their own experiences in traditional and authentic assessment of student learning and shared some of their more successful strategies:

- **Kinesiology** students are asked to do peer teaching which serves to help overcome insecurities and results in their demonstrating knowledge of class information. The discussion group agreed that peer teaching can provide positive encouragement to students and an evolving method of assessment throughout the semester.

- **Developmental Communications** students are assessed on teamwork and active listening.
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- **Geography** students are given assignments with rubrics and write papers which assess their information literacy and critical thinking skills.
- **Chemistry** students are evaluated on the quality of the lab notebooks they keep throughout the semester; record-keeping is an essential skill which has broader application. They also write a scientific paper, which assesses information literacy. Manual skills are evaluated by students’ performance in the lab. Non-traditional lab activities tell students what to do but not how, allowing them to use critical thinking and to apply principles learned in lecture.
- **ESL** students read and interpret an English language newspaper. They use group work to build self-confidence, which helps prepare them for their academic future. The higher level classes write an advanced research paper, which serves to assess their information literacy.
- **Statistics** students analyze data to map the relationship between LACCD money spent and graduation/transfer rates.
- **Business** students use group projects to teach leadership and team building skills. They are asked to research Human Resources methodology and apply it to specific topics. Students use rubrics for their projects and are empowered to run their teams as they see appropriate.
- **Computer Science and Information Technology** students learn problem analysis, communication and listening skills; assessment process is hands-on, based on industry standards using rubrics and pre- and post-project tests. Students are assessed on how well they are able to dismantle, identify, diagnose malfunction of, and reassemble computer components. Students use analytical thinking to create IT operating systems for hypothetical businesses.
- **Math** students use many authentic assessment methods, including the creation and interpretation of graphs, which have real-life applications.
- **Food Service Management** students involved in event planning and execution are asked to assess the success of their projects from start to finish, including analyzing costs/profits and goals met/not met. Culinary events are also used to raise funds for the FSM department and collaborate with other department/disciplines on campus.
- **Sociology** students learn effective interview methodology, conduct in-person interviews on various topics and are asked to present their findings to the class. Others apply what they’ve learned about inductive vs. deductive reasoning by interpreting various film and media. The old method of lecturing to students for 1
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½ hours of class are over, students must be engaged in work that is relevant to them.

- **Psychology** students learn to critically question information and to compare reality vs. ideology. Students analyze misconceptions regarding human sexuality, gender issues, use of language, etc. and evaluate the impact these have on their lives. The field of psychology encourages students to apply concepts to the real world to make informed decisions.

- **Biology** students learn to dissect a piece of scientific literature and analyze its validity in light of what they’ve learned in class. They must be able to explain the scientific concepts and vocabulary contained in the literature to a lay person. Biology students also are assessed on their ability to understand graphical information, analyzing independent vs. dependent variables. Some are asked to write papers arguing pro or con on controversial topics in science, such as ‘the God delusion’, or creationism vs. evolution. One instructor feels that assessment should be ongoing as a catalyst for students to study and uses Etudes for weekly assessments.

- **Theater** students participate in mock auditions, prepare a monologue, and design an element for a play which they then pitch to the class for feedback.

- The **Administration of Justice** chair supplies his instructors with a copy of *Classroom Assessment Techniques* by Angelo Cross as a resource for designing authentic assessments. As an example of students benefitting from cross-discipline cooperation, AJ students in forensic science invited Math students to participate in a project involving the science of trajectory of blood splatter at a crime scene.

- **Political Science** students apply principles of international relations to Obama administration policies and learn to evaluate what constitutes a reliable information source. They also do peer evaluations within project groups.

- **Communication Studies** students study classic leadership styles, and by creating research groups which present at a class symposium, observe emergent leadership styles within the class.

- **Multimedia** students create websites for fictional and real-world businesses, and develop teamwork on specific projects. The Multimedia lab is using student surveys to optimize strategies for lab use.

- **Physiology** students research, discuss and present issues on various topics such as Alzheimer’s disease and genetics as if they were at a conference. The discipline will have a series of workshops to help students learn research methodologies.
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- It was suggested that the students using the STEM labs be tracked on their progress.
- The Library staff is working on creating assessment strategies that will reflect what students are actually using in the classroom.
- In discussing Music appreciation, the question arose what the difference would be between evaluation of proficiency and authentic assessment: proficiency addresses discipline-specific tools, while authentic assessment carries across disciplines. Authentic assessment would evaluate how well a student could explain complex musical ideas to a lay person.
- **Personal Development** students create a worksheet and use a rubric to assess their educational plans.
- [IRubric.com](http://irubric.com) was recommended as a resource for creating (assessment) rubrics.
- MLA (Modern Language Assoc. of America) workshops are conducted by the Library staff for English, AJ and other students to help students practice their writing skills.
- **Art** students are taught creative problem solving through use of rubrics for each assignment. Students also develop teamwork skills on various projects. They improve communication skills through critiquing works of their peers.

Summary

Overall, the response of participants to the Deep Dialog meetings was positive. Faculty members seemed to enjoy hearing what their colleagues were doing in the classroom and were enthusiastic about sharing their own experiences and insights. Some instructors met each other for the first time and there was an atmosphere of openness and collegiality. Resources and tools were offered for participants’ use to help improve their teaching skills and techniques. Ideas were initiated about partnering in projects across disciplines. The Vice President talked about a planned space, named The Eagles Nest, which will be dedicated to faculty members’ use for professional growth activities. Participants were encouraged to meet again monthly with members of their discussion group to continue the conversation.