

PIDP 3230

EVALUATION OF LEARNING



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REFLECTIVE WRITING TWO

“Tell me and I forget, teach me and I may remember, involve me and I learn.”

~ Benjamin Franklin (ELM Learning, 2024)

Objective

Research points to the many social benefits of participation in education, such as:

- Enhanced life skills, self-esteem, and social status.
- Positive social development and increased community involvement Inline: (Christison, 2013).
- Enhanced character development, including time management and leadership skills.
- Better self-rated health, life satisfaction, and happiness (de Róiste et al., 2012).

However, from the perspective of a collegiate web development course, which is inherently vocational in nature and designed to impart industry-specific competencies that foster employability, participation can be seen as a strategic means of enhancing students' professional prospects, in which case the following academic benefits are of particular interest.

- Improve understanding and retention of material.
- Develop critical thinking and communication skills.
- Lead to better academic performance and grades (Oxford Learning, 2023).

In either case, the challenge of designing policy to evaluate participation in education is an interesting one that should be addressed at either the institutional administrative level, or directly by the instructor or curriculum developer.

As such, the objective of this reflective writing is to provide some actionable insights into the evaluation of college student's course participation.

Reflective

“The factory-style education system is oriented toward a certain kind of individual and the more creative, risk-taking and entrepreneurial oriented people often don't fit very well in traditional schools.”

~ Wendy Priesnitz (Pearce, 2019)

From an academic perspective, there are a few challenges that need to be reflected on before recommending approaches to participation evaluation.

One major challenge for instructors is to clearly define what constitutes participation. Participation is a multifaceted construct that subsumes a range of behaviors, including verbal contributions, attentive listening, collaborative engagement, active presentation of ideas, note-taking, and in the context of web development, the completion of coding challenges. Assigning values to specific definitions of participation will clearly define it, both in terms of policy and in terms that can be communicated to students themselves.

A self-directed learning context also presents challenges to effective evaluation of participation in that variability in students' circumstances and learning approaches can complicate assessment.

For example, a student might rarely attend synchronous sessions or miss assignment deadlines but still independently master the course material and achieve the learning objectives. Conversely, another student may be highly active in class discussions and group activities but struggle to demonstrate deeper understanding or critical thinking. A designer of an evaluation policy needs to consider the impact of diversity in student approaches on fairness and relevance when grading participation. Strictly evaluating participation may inadvertently penalize students who, due to personal constraints or learning preferences, engage with material in less conventional but equally effective ways.

In light of these reflections, we can now turn to the question of how to assess participation in ways that are both rigorous and inclusive.

Interpretive

Having established the importance of defining participation in various educational contexts, like a self-directed learning context, we can now list strategies to evaluate and reward participation in education, with their associated pros and cons, keeping in mind that the way we reward participation delineates more clearly how we define it.

1. Direct Strategies for Evaluating and Rewarding Participation

a. Attendance-Based Participation

Measuring participation through student presence, whether in-person or online, offers a straightforward and administratively simple approach that fosters regular engagement, although it falls short in assessing the quality of participation, as students may be physically present without being intellectually engaged.

b. Assignment Completion

By crediting students for submitting assignments regardless of their performance, educators can motivate students to complete and submit work, thereby reducing anxiety related to perfectionism; however, this approach risks encouraging minimal effort and fails to evaluate the depth of understanding.

c. Active Contribution

Assessing participation based on the quality and frequency of contributions to class discussions, group work, or collaborative activities promotes meaningful engagement and develops communication skills, but its subjective nature may inadvertently disadvantage introverted students.

2. Indirect Strategies for Evaluating and Rewarding Participation

a. Embedded Participation in Assessments

Integrating participation into quizzes, tests, or other assessments ensures that students engage with course content and aligns participation with learning objectives, yet it may not comprehensively capture all forms of participation and could be perceived as punitive for students who fall behind.

b. Bonus Marks for Engagement

Offering extra credit or bonus marks for completing optional activities, such as coding challenges or enrichment tasks, encourages voluntary engagement and supports differentiated learning, although it may inadvertently advantage students with more free time and potentially widen achievement gaps.

c. Gamification and Participation Badges

Utilizing game-like elements, such as badges or leaderboards, to reward participation can increase motivation and make participation more visible and rewarding; nonetheless, its appeal may be limited to certain students, and its implementation requires a suitable technological infrastructure.

Decisional

The next step is to encourage implementation of both direct and indirect evaluation of participation strategies in education, which we do in this section.

1. Direct Strategies for Evaluating and Rewarding Participation

a. Attendance-Based Participation

Track attendance for each session and allocate a portion of the final grade to consistent attendance, possibly 2.5% – 10%.

b. Assignment Completion

Assign a percentage of each assignment's grade simply for submission, possibly 2.5% – 10%.

c. Active Contribution

Use rubrics to assess contributions in forums, group projects, or class discussions.

2. Indirect Strategies for Evaluating and Rewarding Participation

a. Embedded Participation in Assessments

Include questions from assigned readings or discussions in quizzes to incentivize engagement with materials.

b. Bonus Marks for Engagement

Track completion of optional challenges and reward with bonus points, possibly 2.5% – 10%.

c. Gamification and Participation Badges

Award digital badges for milestones (e.g., posting in forums, attending sessions), possibly 2.5% – 10%.

Conclusion

In conclusion, evaluating participation in education is a complex task that requires careful consideration of various factors, including the definition of participation, student diversity, and the potential impact on fairness and relevance.

By implementing a multi-faceted approach, that may employ a range of direct and indirect strategies to participation evaluation, educators can promote meaningful engagement, develop critical skills, and foster more inclusive learning environments.

For example, direct rewards for attendance and assignment completion can ensure baseline engagement, while indirect methods like embedding participation in assessments and offering bonus marks can foster deeper involvement.

By combining these approaches and maintaining clear, equitable standards, educators can effectively motivate and measure student participation, ultimately enhancing the learning experience for all.

References

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AI Models Used in Report

The ideas, structure, writing, and editing in this paper were performed by the author. Various AI models were used in collecting data, verifying data, and formatting various arguments.

- Meta Llama 4 Maverick
- Perplexity Sonar Large
- Brave LEO Qwen 14B
- Brave LEO Llama 3.1 8B
- Brave LEO Mixtral 8x7B