Collaborative Assessment of Student Learning: A Tale of Two Departments

Introduction & Research Design
Healey Library and the English department teamed up to assess the impact of library research instruction on undergraduate students enrolled in ENGL 102 at UMass Boston in Spring 2016.

Research Question
How does research instruction impact students’ ability to transfer research skills from one context to another?

Methodology
Quasi-experimental, as we could not randomly assign students to control or experimental groups; mixed methods, as we used both quantitative and qualitative data collection procedures.

Sampling
Voluntary convenience sample; participating ENGL 102 sections were volunteered by their instructors.

Hypothesis
Research instruction will increase students’ ability to transfer research skills from one context to another.

Instruments
Booklet, rubric (to evaluate the booklet), pre-test, post-test

Participation & Data Collection
- 10 faculty and 24 ENGL 102 sections participated in our study
- All 5 instruction librarians at UMass Boston participated, teaching at least one research instruction session
- Overall, 320 students attended research instruction sessions, and from those 320 students we collected:
  - 281 pre-tests from students enrolled across all 24 participating ENGL 102 sections
  - 222 booklets from students enrolled in 20 of 24 participating sections
  - 250 post-tests from students enrolled in 22 of 24 participating sections by the end of the Spring 2016 semester

Quantitative Data – Numb3r3 N3rd FTW
Five post-test questions were designed to gather quantitative data and gauge student understanding of concepts covered in research instruction sessions:
- Select the research question from the following example that, in your opinion, would set you up most successfully for completing a five-page paper.
- To search for journal articles, the best starting place is…
- To search for books on a specific subject, the best starting place is…
- True/False: If you need research help, you should contact Ask a Librarian.
- Which of the following is most likely to be the best resource to quote in a research paper?

Qualitative Data – For the Word Nerds
Several booklet pages included questions asking students to reflect on what they were doing and learning. Two post-test questions were similarly designed to gather even more qualitative data and to gauge student understanding of concepts covered in research instruction sessions:
- Word cloud of ENGL 102 students’ booklet responses to the question “Reflect on the different databases you have explored. How would you describe the differences among the databases? Explain your understanding of the differences among the databases…”
- “I am reading student papers right now, and I have to say that most of them are using much better sources than in the past. And I used to deal with students saying they couldn’t find ANY sources – not this semester.”

Oops! We Won’t Do It Again AKA Lessons Learned
- There’s Something About the Booklets: They were considered valuable by both faculty and students. This was both a blessing and a curse: students did NOT want to part with their booklets, even for one day!
- Convenience Trumps All: If you show students how to email articles to themselves, they will not necessarily write down the articles’ bibliographic information.
- Keep it Simple: Don’t try to assess too many learning outcomes at once! We only had 3, which still resulted in a lesson plan that packed too many things into too little time and a booklet that the majority of students had difficulty completing in class.
- Future Improvements: In the next round, we will break the lesson plan into smaller chunks, with instructional responsibilities shared between librarians and faculty.

Everything is Awesome AKA More Lessons Learned and Best Practices
- Student Learning: Even when students did not identify the best answer for a post-test question, they often picked a good “wrong” answer.
- Leading a Team & Project Management: Put together a large team with diverse roles: they will not necessarily write down the articles’ bibliographic information.
- Divide As Needed: If the circumstances call for it, don’t be afraid to stay from the plan to address more immediate needs. In one section, we noticed the students were having difficulty brainstorming keywords; we dropped the study’s lesson plan for the second session in favor of an in-depth exploration of keywords. It was immensely valuable for the students and a worthwhile reason to sacrifice data.

LITERATURE REVIEW


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Although many assessment evaluation measures have been used, Rubrics are often employed when educators must judge the quality of performances or constructed-response instruments we used to gather information from...” (p. 258).