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The Design and Evaluation of a Class Session Evaluation Tool for Courses Offered in Hybrid Format

Jayne A. Sparks
St. Catherine University

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The Design and Evaluation of a Class Session Evaluation Tool
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Jayne A. Sparks

St. Catherine University
Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to introduce a class session evaluation tool which was developed as an aid to the faculty of the RN-to-BS Degree Completion (RN-BS) Section offered by the Baccalaureate Degree Program in the Department of Nursing at St. Catherine University. In the past year, several changes were made to the RN-BS Section which included the transition from trimesters to semesters as well as a change to a hybrid format. These changes resulted in the need for the RN-to-BS Section to double the number of class hours to meet the new definition of a credit hour, as well as changes to class session objectives and teaching methods. The faculty recognized a need to synthesize the results of the class session evaluation process to facilitate the incorporation of feedback into changes during subsequent class sessions and subsequent iterations of the course. Their ultimate goal was to ensure that changes made to courses and curricula resulted in student achievement of course learning objectives, continued compliance with accreditation and University requirements, and student satisfaction to ensure student retention. Following an extensive review of the literature, a class session evaluation tool was developed and tested with the students and faculty of the RN-BS Completion Section. In addition, a student session feedback form was developed and administered. The paper describes the process of developing the class session evaluation tool as well as general recommendations for class session evaluation.
The Design and Evaluation of a Class Session Evaluation Tool for Courses Offered in Hybrid Format

The RN-to-BS Degree Completion (RN-BS) Section offered by the Baccalaureate Degree Program in the Department of Nursing at St. Catherine University underwent major changes beginning in the fall of 2012. The changes were necessitated as a part of the Weekend College (WEC) Redesign and were mandated by the Federal Department of Education and the Higher Learning Commission. One of the major changes involved transitioning from trimesters to semesters, resulting in the need for the RN-to-BS Degree Completion Section to double the number of class hours to meet the new definition of a credit hour. This required major changes in class session objectives and teaching methods. In order to comply with the University requirements and to remain competitive with the market demands, it was also decided that the program of study should transition from face-to-face to a hybrid format, which required major modifications to teaching methods. The program of study faculty recognized the importance of course and curriculum evaluation. They were especially interested in evaluating the class sessions to ensure that the change in course delivery format resulted in high quality courses which met the needs of the students in facilitating their achievement of course learning outcomes. In addition, they wanted to be sure that accreditation and University requirements continued to be met. Lastly, they wanted to be sure that student satisfaction remained high to ensure student retention and a continued increase in student enrollment.

The RN-BS faculty began meeting weekly during the fall of 2012 to discuss what went well and did not go well the previous class week, which included both a face-to-face and an online component. They found, however, that they did not have a method for capturing all components of the evaluation process for each class session. They also were unsure as to
whether they were obtaining enough timely feedback from students about the students’ ability to achieve the learning objectives with the existing teaching methods. They were especially interested in the efficacy of the online component of the class sessions.

The faculty requested assistance in organizing the various components of evaluation relative to individual class sessions. Their goal was to synthesize the results of the class session evaluation process to facilitate the incorporation of feedback into changes during subsequent class sessions and subsequent iterations of the course. Their ultimate goal was to ensure that changes made to courses and class sessions resulted in student achievement of course learning objectives, continued compliance with accreditation and University requirements, and student satisfaction to ensure student retention. The faculty also requested assistance in developing and implementing a tool for class session evaluation, while being sensitive to the time requirement for the students to complete additional evaluations.

**Literature Review**

Evaluation in education occurs for different reasons at different times. The reasons for which evaluation occurs include facilitating learning, diagnosing problems, making decisions, improving products, judging effectiveness, and judging cost-effectiveness (Bourke & Ihrke, 2009). Bourke and Ihrke also note that, “In nursing education, evaluations or judgments are made about performance (students), program effectiveness (a nursing curriculum or program), instructional media (a textbook, a computer-assisted instruction program), or instruction (course, faculty)” (p. 392). There is significant overlap between the subjects and purposes of evaluation. For example, course evaluation includes student evaluation and the extent to which students are able to meet course learning objectives is a factor in the evaluation of the course and class
sessions. The focus of this literature review is class session evaluation but it is impossible to completely separate class session evaluation from course and program evaluation.

Much has been written about program and curriculum evaluation but much less has been written about course evaluation. Even less has been written about individual class session evaluation. The literature often classifies evaluation as formative or summative. Summative course evaluation is conducted at the end of a learning activity and formative course evaluation is conducted throughout the duration of the course. Class session evaluation by students is generally formative evaluation to the extent that the results of the student evaluations influence the content or teaching methods of subsequent class sessions.

**Summative Evaluation**

Summative evaluation is a necessary component of the evaluation process because it allows for an assessment of the final results. As explained by Stewart, Waight, Norwood, and Ezell (2004), summative evaluation is important because it can provide suggestions on course redesign for future students. Approaches to summative course evaluation include student course evaluations, student faculty evaluations, and faculty course evaluations. For the purposes of this paper, emphasis will be placed on formative evaluation of class sessions.

**Formative Evaluation**

Formative evaluation is conducted while the event is occurring and identifies progress toward the objectives or outcomes. According to Bourke and Ihrke (2009), “formative evaluation emphasizes the parts instead of the entirety” (p. 393). Stewart, Waight, Norwood, and Ezell (2004) focused on evaluation of online courses and noted that both formative and summative evaluation are important. They discussed the importance of course design in the online environment and opined that formative evaluation gives faculty the opportunity to make
changes along the way, “to improve their course design to better facilitate learning” (p. 102).

Angelo and Cross (1993) state that “there is no such thing as effective teaching in the absence of learning” (p. 3). They suggest that faculty and students need methods through which learning is monitored throughout a course. They suggest that classroom assessment is a mutually beneficial, learner-centered, context-specific approach to help teachers find out what and how well students are learning. They explain that Classroom Assessment Techniques (CATs) are a type of formative evaluation, the purpose of which is “to improve the quality of student learning” (p. 5). The One Minute Paper (OMP) is a type of Classroom Assessment Technique (CAT). Angelo and Cross describe a number of other CATs including Muddiest Point, One-Sentence Summary, and Chain Notes. Stead (2005) suggests that the OMP is generally regarded positively by faculty due to its ease of use and the valuable information it can provide. He also notes that it tends to be viewed positively by students because it suggests that the teacher values the students’ opinions and feedback. When used at the end of a specific class session, the OMP is a form of formative evaluation and when given at the end of a course, it tends to be summative evaluation.

**Student Evaluations**

Pepe and Wang (2012) discuss the concept of the student as “educational consumer” and opine that there is no denying the importance of the role of the student in evaluating instruction in higher education. They also found that the ability of the teacher to effectively communicate was consistently related to the overall score given by students in the Student Evaluation of Instruction (SEI). Baldwin and Blattner (2003) state that many institutions of higher education use the results from SEIs for decisions about the retention and promotion of faculty as well as decisions about course content. They note, however, that results can be biased. Jones (2012) notes that there is still controversy over whether student evaluations are a valid method of
evaluating teaching effectiveness and course content. She also notes that the results of student evaluations are not always utilized by faculty to improve teaching. Kalayci and Cimen (2012) state that the quality of teaching is thought to be a major factor influencing the quality of education. As a result, evaluation of teaching effectiveness is considered very important. They conducted a study to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching in higher education in Turkey. Based upon the outcome of their study, they determined that questionnaires with lack of reliability and validity will negatively impact both summative and formative evaluation. Steiger and Burger (2010) note that student evaluations have been considered controversial for the past few decades but are an important vehicle through which to improve the quality of teaching. They also indicate that student evaluations are traditionally summative in nature and obtained at the end of a course. They suggest a formative approach to student evaluations whereby each course unit or class session is evaluated.

Cooper (2013) opines that course evaluations are often viewed as a chore and not as an opportunity to obtain valuable information. He states, however, that when used effectively, they can be a very useful tool. He explains that it is critical to solicit feedback throughout the course when changes can still be made based upon student input. Among his specific recommendations are to state questions clearly and to ask the right questions based upon the information needed. He also recommends asking for written comments and to share the results of the evaluations with the students. Weimer (2013) states that student evaluations have limited value because students do not take the process of course or class session evaluation seriously, especially since most rating forms are now completed online. She adds that when students do not believe their opinions will be taken seriously, they do not provide high quality feedback.
Steiger and Burger (2010) opine that formative evaluations are not utilized extensively because the time involved for administration of the evaluations and analysis of the data is thought to be excessive. They conducted a study in which they compared the results of summative and formative evaluations and found that they provide different information. They concluded that “formative evaluations tap into aspects of course evaluation than summative evaluations do” (p. 163). They utilized Twitter as a means through which to obtain and analyze evaluation data and concluded that doing so resulted in low administrative effort.

**Multiple Source Evaluation**

Fink (2003) recommends obtaining evaluative information from multiple sources. He states that the simplest and most common method is to administer a questionnaire to students. Fink suggests, however, that options exist for course and course session evaluation beyond student questionnaires. He offers the option of gathering information through discussions with students or by observation of faculty by peers. He recommends asking several questions as a part of the evaluation process including, “To what degree are your goals for the course being achieved?” (p. 145). He suggests a mid-term evaluation, at a minimum, to allow for time to address student concerns and to make adjustments to teaching methods, if needed. Tunks (2012) concurs, suggesting that faculty go beyond what is required of them by their teaching institution. She recommends anonymous evaluation by students at midterm to allow for immediate adjustments based upon student feedback.

Bourke and Ihrke (2009) suggest a triangulation approach to course evaluation. This approach includes data from three sources: faculty, students, and materials. Dunet and Reyes (2006) suggest that different stakeholders in the education process may have different definitions of success related to a course or training program. The authors recommend evaluation planning
as an opportunity to tailor methods and data collection to meet the needs of the stakeholders. They state that since full-scale evaluations are expensive to implement, most efforts at evaluation focus on student satisfaction and knowledge gains. In the context of course session evaluation, the students would be the stakeholders. Dunet and Reyes suggest the use of stakeholder focused evaluations that are brief and used throughout training development and delivery. They note that with the goals of the stakeholders in mind, they “devised a written evaluation plan that included formative, process, and outcome measures” (p. 262).

**Professional Standards Addressing Assessment and Evaluation**

The importance of assessment and evaluation in nursing education is explicitly addressed in the *Core Competencies of Nurse Educators* (National League for Nursing [NLN], 2005). Core Competency III states: “Nurse educators use a variety of strategies to assess and evaluate student learning in classroom, laboratory, and clinical settings, as well as in all domains of learning” (p. 3). Specific task statements (behaviors) are also identified by the NLN for nurse educators to ensure the effective use of assessment and evaluation strategies:

1. Uses extent literature to develop evidence-based assessment and evaluation practices
2. Uses a variety of strategies to assess and evaluate learning in the cognitive, psychomotor, and affective domains
3. Implements evidence-based assessment and evaluation strategies that are appropriate to the learner and to learning goals
4. Uses assessment and evaluative data to enhance the teaching-learning process
5. Provides timely, constructive, and thoughtful feedback to learners
6. Demonstrates skill in the design and use of tools for assessing clinical practice
The use of tools specifically designed to elicit student feedback following each class session enables nurse educators to evaluate the quality of student learning and provides an opportunity for nurse educators to enhance the teaching-learning process for students based on desired learning outcomes for each class session.

**Development of Class Session Feedback Form**

A student class session feedback form was created and tested in an effort to enhance the class session evaluation process for the faculty of the RN-to-BS Degree Completion Section (see Appendix A). The form included questions to which the faculty wanted answers in their evaluation of class sessions. It asked for information including how much time was spent preparing for the class session. This information was of particular interest to the RN-to-BS faculty given their recent transition to hybrid format. The form also asked whether the readings were relevant to the face-to-face session and whether the class discussions were thought provoking. The form was initially tested in December of 2012 and administered to students again during spring semester, 2013. For the December testing, the form was uploaded to the course D2L site under Surveys and explained to students during face-to-face class sessions. The students were asked to complete the evaluation within one week and at the conclusion of that week, only 6 of 21 students (< 30%) completed the survey.

Following the initial testing, the feedback form was modified to include primarily a rating scale versus short answers. Rather than requesting that students complete the form online following class, the feedback form was given to and collected from each group of students at the conclusion of one class sessions during the spring term. Doing so resulted in a 100% return rate rather than a 28.5% return rate. The results were tabulated, analyzed, and shared with faculty.
Development of Class Session Evaluation Tracking Tool

According to Kogan and Shea (2007), four questions are necessary to consider in developing high quality course evaluation: Why evaluate? What is evaluated? Who evaluates? When to evaluate? Bastable (2008) suggests a similar set of questions to provide a framework for program evaluation: What types of data will be collected? From whom or what will data be collected? How, when, and where will data be collected? By whom will data be collected? These questions can also be applied to class session evaluation because decisions need to be made by faculty, for example, about when to administer student evaluations and about the specific questions that will be asked of the students in the class session evaluation. In order to construct meaningful questions, it is important for faculty to ask why they are evaluating. For example, they may want to know if the reading assignments help students achieve learning outcomes. They may also want to know if assignments are explained clearly or obtain students’ input as to whether online activities are relevant to the class session objectives.

In order to answer the questions posed by Kogan and Shea (2007) and Bastable (2008) with regard to class session evaluation for the RN-BS Completion Section at St. Catherine University, information was gathered by gaining access to the Desire2Learn site for the course. Desire2Learn (D2L) is a course management system used at St. Catherine University. Review of the syllabus provided valuable information as to course assignments and course evaluation techniques. Data were also gathered by attending a weekly faculty meeting in which course faculty members meet to do a quick assessment of what worked and what should be changed the next time the course is taught.

A tracking tool was created for the faculty of the RN-BS Degree Completion Section in response to their expressed need for a better method to capture all aspects of class session evaluation (see Appendix B). The development of this tool was based upon data that were
already being captured by the faculty during weekly meetings during which they discussed what went well and what did not go well during the previous class session. The faculty recognized that they needed a more organized method to capture and save specific data such as choice of teaching methods and learning activities. They also wanted to capture information related to how they knew desired student learning outcomes for each class session were being achieved by the students. In addition, they recognized that they needed to capture practical considerations such as timing of learning activities and value of assignments in contributing to student achievement of learning outcomes. This integrated tool was developed by synthesizing multiple evaluation tools reviewed in the literature as well as seeking faculty input and recommendations.

The first component of the class session evaluation tool, after the date of the session, consists of the class session objectives. The objectives are included on the assessment tool to keep them visible to the faculty when they meet to evaluate the course sessions. The next section captures how the course session objectives map to the course objectives. This is thought to be important since it is critical that session objectives be consistent with course objectives (Dillard & Siktberg, 2009, p. 393). According to Uchiyama and Radin (2009), “Curriculum mapping is an ongoing, dynamic process” and provides a method to align the curriculum with the objectives” (p. 279). Teaching methods are documented next. In order to assess the value of teaching methods and to promote consistency between sections, the faculty felt it was important to capture these data on the evaluation tool. The next section of the evaluation tool captures evidence that class session objectives are met or not met by students. An example of information that is recorded in this section includes observation of participation in discussion, either online or face-to-face, by all students. Another example of information that might go in this section is that presentations by small groups provide relevant references to required reading, suggesting that the
students have met the desired class objectives. Conversely, a lack of substantial information or an inability to answer questions during a presentation might suggest that the desired class objectives were not met. The next two sections capture what went well and what did not go well during the previous face-to-face and online sessions. This section includes information such as faculty observation of lively, stimulating discussions, either conducted during the previous face-to-face session or the previous week’s online asynchronous discussion, suggesting the discussion topic was relevant. Conversely, numerous questions from students regarding course assignments would suggest a lack of clarity regarding assignments and faculty expectations. The next two sections of the tool are designed to capture results of CATs and Student Session Feedback Forms, if they are utilized. The following section captures content evaluation which is a critical component of the evaluation process. The information that is collected in this section is an assessment of whether the content is determined to be important and whether it is in the right place in the curriculum. The final and most important section of the tool is space to capture recommendations for changes to teaching methods for future class sessions as well as future iterations of the course.

Conclusions

The literature is in strong support of frequent formative evaluations by students using CATs or other forms of student evaluation. Rather than waiting until the end of a course, many experts in curriculum design and evaluation recommend that student evaluations be obtained frequently during a course to ensure desired student learning outcomes are being achieved and faculty are responding to student feedback in a timely and effective manner (Cooper, 2013; Fink, 2003; Steiger & Burger, 2010). Experts also describe a general consensus that students provide more valuable feedback when they believe their opinions will be taken seriously. Therefore, it is
critical that faculty share the results of student evaluations with the students and explain how the information will be utilized to make changes to subsequent class sessions or future iterations of the course.

Input was obtained from the faculty of the RN-to-BS Degree Completion Section regarding the efficacy of the Session Feedback Form (Appendix A) and the Course Evaluation Tracking Tool (Appendix B) developed by this author. The faculty were in agreement that the Session Feedback Form provided valuable information but they were concerned about students’ receptiveness to completing such a form after each class session. They recommended that the form be administered to each group of students at least once during the course. They were receptive to the idea of a focus group of students to obtain their input as to the frequency of these formative evaluations.

The faculty were also unanimous in their support of the Course Evaluation Tracking Tool. They agreed that it is important that it be completed online during the weekly faculty meeting to ensure its completion and to save time. They noted that the information collected on the tool will provide useful information in the completion of the course evaluation required by the University at the end of each course. In addition and most importantly, it will provide valuable information to ensure that the class sessions remain robust in their ability to facilitate student learning.

**Recommendations**

I have recommended to the faculty of the RN-to-BS Degree Completion Section that they obtain more frequent formative evaluation, capturing evaluative data from both the previous week’s online and face-to-face component. In response to faculty’s concern that students would react negatively to more frequent requests for class session evaluations, I have recommended that a focus group be conducted at the end of summer session, 2013, to obtain input from students
regarding more frequent class session evaluations. I anticipate that such a focus group will provide insight as to students’ receptiveness to regular evaluations. I have also recommended that the faculty continue their current practice of discussions of the previous week’s class sessions and documentation of the outcome and their recommendations. In addition, I have suggested that they be intentional about telling students when changes are made to teaching methods or assignment as a result of their feedback.

Although online assessments are much easier to administer, the rate of participation is higher with paper evaluations, administered during face-to-face class sessions. Consideration should be given to an electronic response system but with a requirement for student participation as well as a method for tracking student participation in the evaluation process. When there are multiple sections of a course, I have also recommended that all sections be consistent in terms of frequency and content of formative evaluation to allow for comparison between sections and evaluation of differences in teaching methods and content.

Frequent, ongoing evaluation is critical to quality nursing education. It needs to be intentional, meaningful, and organized to be successful. Class session evaluation is a critical component of course and curriculum evaluation because individual class sessions are the building blocks that make up a course. Responding to student evaluations in a timely manner demonstrates to students they are being heard and their feedback is making a difference, which not only promotes the faculty-student relationship but encourages students to take subsequent evaluations seriously. Lastly, the ultimate goal of teaching is student learning and specifically, student achievement of desired learning outcomes. Evaluating each class session and including student feedback on a regular basis increases the likelihood of meaningful learning experiences and appropriate teaching methods, the goal of which is student learning.
References


Appendix A

Session Feedback Form

Date: ________

1. Approximately how much time did you spend preparing for tonight’s class session, including assignments?

☐ 0-3 hours
☐ 4-6 hours
☐ 7-10 hours
☐ More than 10 hours

2. During tonight’s class session, the general direction of class discussion was thought provoking.

☐ Strongly agree
☐ Agree
☐ Disagree
☐ Strongly disagree

3. The required readings for this week were relevant to tonight’s face to face session.

☐ Strongly agree
4. The teaching/learning methods used during tonight's class session promoted my learning.

☐ Strongly agree
☐ Agree
☐ Disagree
☐ Strongly disagree

5. What was most helpful/interesting to you about this class session?

6. What was not helpful to you about this class session?

7. What additional comments do you have about tonight’s class session?
## Appendix B

### Class Session Evaluation Tool

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of Session</th>
<th>Session Topic</th>
<th>Session Learner Objectives</th>
<th>How Session Objectives Map to Course Objectives</th>
<th>Teaching Methods</th>
<th>Evidence That Session Objectives Were Met</th>
<th>What Went Well?</th>
<th>What Did Not Go Well?</th>
<th>Results of CATS if Used</th>
<th>Results of Student Session Feedback Form</th>
<th>Content Evaluation</th>
<th>Recommendations for Changes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
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<td>Examples: Participation in discussion by all students; presentations by small groups provided relevant information, etc.</td>
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