Is Multitasking a Myth?

Engaging Students Through Performance Tasks While Enhancing Critical Thinking

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*pictures courtesy of Google Images
Well, let’s just see if you can multitask!!

YES…IT’S A QUIZ!
This is one of those topics that:

- Has practical implications in the real world (authenticity)
- Is multi-disciplinary (social sciences, biology, business, education, communication, etc.)
- Lends itself very well to a performance task that taps critical thinking and problem-solving, as students weight evidence
Some Facts...

- 90% of higher ed faculty feel that critical thinking is the most important goal of an undergrad education\(^1\)
- 6% of college seniors are “proficient” in critical thinking, 77% are “not proficient”\(^2\)
- A good [college] education should provide multiple opportunities for students to engage in “inquiry-based learning,” both independently and in collaborative teams.”\(^3\)

Just what is “critical thinking”?

- Subset of “higher-order thinking” along with analytical reasoning & problem-solving
- Includes considering issue from multiple perspectives
- Critically examining evidence
- Valuing claims backed by appropriate & adequate evidence
- Reasoning objectively & dispassionately
- Arriving at informed judgments & decisions
Some background...

- BU applied & accepted to join the CIC/CLA Consortium (Council of Independent Colleges and Collegiate Learning Assessment)
- BU began using the CLA (approx. 100 freshmen and 100 seniors) in 2010-11
- Collaboration among institutions, strategies, assessment data for institutional use (we now have two data sets)
Let’s try a Performance Task!

Boutique Architectural

You have been hired as a consultant. Your charge is to review the literature on employee distractions and productivity and make a recommendation regarding the pros and cons of adopting a policy on the use of the internet and social media by employees at Boutique Architectural.

(See attached scenario.)
So...what answers do you have???

- Learning objectives/outcomes for the task?
- Questions you want students to identify?
- Types and sources of evidence?
- Format for the final product?
- Should there be one “correct” finding or multiple solutions?
How was this a Performance Task?

- Used authentic scenario for active engagement
- Mirrored the ambiguity and complexity of real-world challenges, ie., information may be conflicting or partial, or have competing frameworks
- Engaged higher-order thinking, with a focus on analyzing, synthesizing, & applying evidence to arrive at a judgment or decision
In designing this task,

- You would create a “product” that is authentic (memo, presentation, plan of action)
- You would have clear evaluation criteria and rubrics to provide for self-evaluation and diagnostic feedback on strengths & weaknesses
- You would have designed the task by determining learning outcomes first (backward design)
How does one do “backward design”?

- **STEP 1**: Identify desired results (what do you want students to know & do?)
- **STEP 2**: Determine acceptable evidence (what will give you evidence of student proficiency?)
- **STEP 3**: What learning experiences & instruction (including materials & resources) will accomplish 1 & 2?
More decisions... or, how do I score this?

- Scoring depends on the objective for the task and the skills attached to the task.
- Do you want only individual scores, group scores, or both?
- Is your goal to assess writing effectiveness?
- Yes, a different rubric may need to be created with each task.
- You may want to use broader categories such as: emerging – developing - mastering.
Implementing metacognition (thinking about one’s own thinking) will...

- Encourage students to define “higher level thinking” for themselves
- Encourage students to evaluate & assess their own skills in problem-solving & critical thinking
- Provide feedback to the instructor as to which students have not mastered the content or skills fully
Accomplishments/Hurdles

Yea!!!
- Student engagement
- Multiple perspectives
- Group dynamics
- (What else?)

Ohhhh...
- Preparation
- Time to administer
- Varying assessments
- (What else?)
What can BU do to support faculty in this endeavor? Perhaps a Faculty Learning Community?

Additional Resources:

- www.collegiatelearningassessment.org
- www.claintheclassroom.org
And...there’s more to come next week!

- We’ll tackle the specifics of assessing performance tasks;
- How they might be developed and used across disciplines; and
- How to integrate them into courses!

In the meantime...keep