

Learning & Teaching Update

Formative Assessment and Why Students Did Not Learn



Introduction



This issue of Learning and Teaching Update is Neil Holm's Summary of a Presentation by Royce Sadler at the SCD Professional Development Day on Assessment, Booth College, 23 October 2010. This summary is a brief version of some of the things Royce said and it includes some illustrative material that Royce referred to but did not address directly.

*Royce has provided us with a copy of his presenter's prompts. The prompts will make most sense to those present when it was delivered. Not all of the material in the prompts is covered in the **Beyond Feedback** article. Permission is given for the prompts in this form to be circulated informally. The prompts paper is not available for citation, uploading to publicly accessible web sites, or widespread digital distribution. The expanded work is currently being developed into a book chapter. The prompts and the **Beyond Feedback** article are available on the SCD Google Documents site. Please contact [Neil Holm](#) if you need access to the Google Docs site. Other relevant documents can be found on the [Professional Development](#) wiki.*

Assessment has two functions:

- To certify that the student has achieved a certain standard, that their performance meets certain criteria, or that they have achieved a certain level of competence.
- To help students learn.

Although we might construe our roles in theological colleges in various ways, we are educators above all else.

“A disciple is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully qualified will be like the teacher” (Luke 6:40). As teachers, we have the responsibility to ensure that our students are fully qualified, that they are competent, in the same way that we are qualified and competent. Good assessment will help students learn profoundly and quickly.

Being Like the Teacher . . .

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Diary Claimer: Re-accreditation Issues: Tuesday 1 February

Have your say! Faculty discussion of Curriculum Design Principles and shaping the SCD curriculum for re-accreditation.

Booth College 9 —5. <http://courseworksandpit.wetpaint.com/page/Curriculum+Consolidation>

The word “assess” has its roots in the idea of “sitting beside”. In its earliest uses it related to the tax auditor sitting beside the client to assess the tax that was due. It is a collegial act rather than inquisitor.

To assess well we need to acknowledge that our goal is to encourage complex learning. This means seeking divergent tasks rather than convergent tasks that lead to a single answer. Multiple-choice questions do not lend themselves to divergent activity.

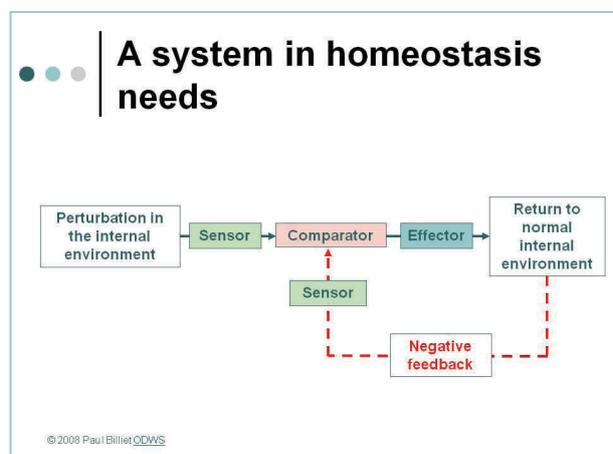
Our typical patterns of providing feedback are inefficient and not effective. Writing notes on essays is hard work: labour intensive, slow, with a high emotional investment. We usually give written feedback plus a mark but invariably students look only to the mark and ignore the feedback. Our comments are often specific and students may have trouble in moving beyond the specific comments in the context of this essay to a more generalised solution for future tasks.

We can apply the concept of homeostasis to the feedback process. In homeostasis a steady state in a body is maintained despite changes in the external environment. The steady state is the optimum level for functioning. The following [images](#) summarise this process.

A system in homeostasis needs

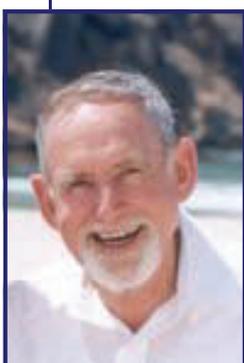
- Sensors to detect changes in the internal environment
- A comparator which fixes the set point of the system (e.g. body temperature).
- The set point will be the optimum condition under which the system operates
- Effectors which bring the system back to the set point
- Feedback control. Negative feedback stops the system over compensating (going too far)
- A communication system to link the different parts together

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Students need to understand the set point: what is the optimum condition that their assignment must capture? As they work on the assignment, they feel a sense of perturbation: am I doing the right thing? They need to be able to sense or detect the quality of their own work and compare it to the set point. Then they need to know what to do in order to effect the change that is necessary so that they regain a sense of calm that they have achieved the desired standard. The feedback mechanism is both the student and the teacher. As the student reflects further on their work, continues to refine it, they check again against the set point to ensure that they are matching the standard. The teacher is another element in the feedback process. The assessing actions of the teacher provide additional input for the student that continues to allow them to compare their work with the set standard and to continue to effect change His current projects focus on academic achievement standards in higher education and making assessment work more effectively for improving student learning.

However, it is also important to factor in the concept of feedforward as well as feedback. In feedforward,

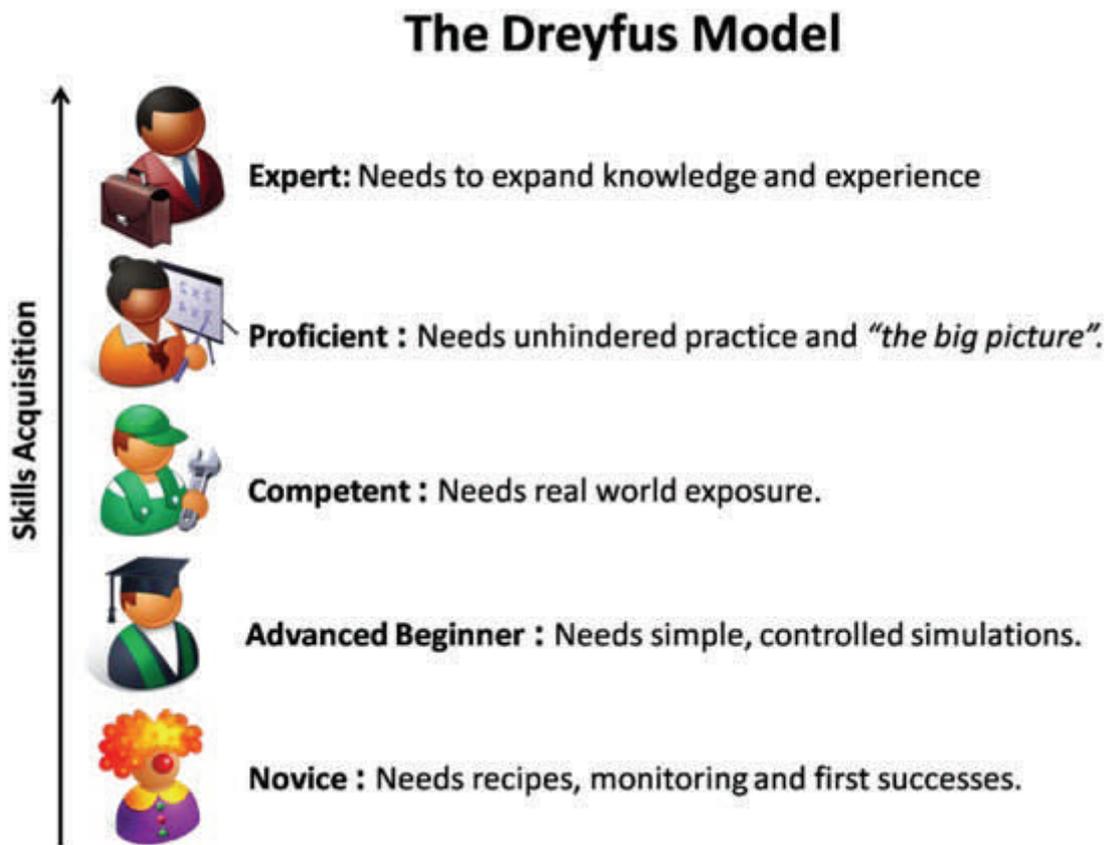


The SCD Google Docs site has copies of Royce's papers

- **Beyond Feedback (journal article)**
 - **Designing effective assessment tasks**
 - **Royce's presenter's prompts**
- (or contact [Neil Holm](#))**

student (and teacher) monitors the assignment-writing process directly, and applies appropriate adjustments as the task proceeds — rather than waiting for feedback on partial progress in the process before giving compensatory signals. Sadler discusses these concepts in the paper on p.538

Sadler suggests that the Dreyfus model of skill acquisition offers some guidance in helping students develop the skills necessary for academic success. The Dreyfus brothers briefly [describe the process](#) using examples of learning how to drive a car and how to play chess. The following illustration shows the main features



As the title of the Dreyfus paper suggests, there is a strong element of apprenticeship in the process – students must observe, notice, reflect, build on experience, and test their knowledge and skill by application. Sadler described the manner in which he applied this process at university.

1. He gave the lecture
2. Challenged students to write 300 words in response to an assessment task.
3. Students brought three copies (identified by their name or a code) of the paper to class
4. Students switch the papers around.
5. Students read the paper they have been given and
 - a. "mark" it on a continuum between Bad and Good
 - b. BAD-----X-----GOOD
 - c. Write 200 words on why they did this
 - d. Write 50 words on what they need to do to improve
 - e. Return paper
6. Students swap again and one more time again after that.

This process gives students an opportunity to make judgments and to figure out and apply their own criteria. This process is a version of the process described in the *Beyond Feedback* article on page 547.