Chapter 9

Preactive Stage:
Lesson and Program Evaluation

EVALUATION OF THE ONLINE LEARNING PROCESS

There are two types of evaluation that are conducted in the online program. The first is the evaluation of learning and the second is the evaluation on the effectiveness of the course. This chapter will discuss both.

As previously mentioned, when the instructional designer has completed the objectives he/she can plan the lesson and establish the evaluation process to measure the course outcomes. Evaluation in the online as in the face-to-face course involves both the summative and formative. Summative evaluation is evaluation that takes place in that end of a lesson or series of objectives. It can be described as a formal type of evaluation as it measures the sum of all learning that has occurred at the end of a period of time or at the end of a competency based lesson. It is utilized to measure the degree to which the objectives have been met and to assess student learning for posting grades and in some instances to provide certification of knowledge and skill attained. In the online environment it can take the form of online exams, projects or skills exams (Figure 1).

The formative evaluation takes place during the formation of learning, as the lessons and the online course progresses. This is evaluation that takes place by the instructor to understand if the student is grasping the concepts and developing the skills and if the objectives are taking place. Some instructors in the traditional setting call this “checking for understanding.” It is also referred as an informal evaluation as it occurs during the process of learning from week to week through the interactions that occur through observations and questioning through assignments, emails, through threaded discussions in the discussion boards (asynchronous) or in virtual chats (synchronous).

The question always arises as which of these, the summative (formal) or the formative (informal) is more important. Some feel that the summative, which happens at the end, is what matters as it is quantitative and truly measures the knowledge and skills that have been learned. If the student however has not attained the necessary knowledge and skill.

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then there is nothing that can be done other than have the student retake the online course and try again. Others believe that it is the formative as the instructor can assess whether learning is occurring during the teaching and learning process and make the necessary adjustments as learning progresses. The real answer is that they are both important and both vital in assuring that skills and knowledge are attained. It is important that we measure the final learning through exams, skill demonstrations and papers or projects to know whether students have achieved the desired levels of success and if our pedagogies were of value to help them get there. It is just as important however that the formative be incorporated so that we can have an ongoing assessment throughout the course to know if the pedagogies are being effective and guiding the student toward the desired learning. If they are not then we can make the necessary adjustments and try different activities or interactions that may be better. If they are, then we move forward with the plan as designed and continue to monitor.

**SUMMATIVE EVALUATION**

Summative evaluation can be the trickiest for educators to deal with in the online arena. The idea of the online graded assignment makes some educators nervous that we are really not getting the same evaluation as that provided in the face to face. Many instructors worry about the academic integrity of the online exam or grading the online paper. This is not so different than the issues faced by classroom teachers long before computer and online education became part of the lexicon of opportunities. Olt (2002) describes four issues with the use of online summative assessments:

- The instructor’s inability to identify that the student is actually the person completing the evaluation instrument.
- The instructor’s inability to control the student’s use of unauthorized materials while completing the evaluation (text book, notes, Internet, libraries, etc.).
- The possibility of student collaboration.
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