

Background Information

General Description of the School Psychology Program at UW-La Crosse:

- Students obtain an Educational Specialist (Ed.S.) degree in School Psychology by completing 3 years of full time study:
 - Years 1-2: On campus coursework.
 - Year 3: Full time internship.
- Successful completion of the program leads to full licensure as a School Psychologist.
- One of the program goals is to train School Psychologists to be experts in child assessment in the educational setting (among other goals). Therefore, students take a series of assessment-related courses, as well as participate in practicum experiences in the local schools where they apply these skills.

PSY 756: Early Childhood Assessment

- One of the courses students take is PSY 756: Early Childhood Assessment.
 - The goal of this course, broadly speaking, is to build upon their foundational knowledge in Psychoeducational Assessment (i.e., intellectual, academic, social-emotional) specific to early childhood populations (children aged 3-5 years).
 - Class size is typically 12 second-year graduate students.
 - This course is classroom-based (lecture and problem/case-based learning). Like most students, School Psychology graduate students learn best when they are completing “hands on” activities. So, in past years, students have:
 - Completed an early childhood assessment case at their practicum setting.
 - Completed observations of children in local early childhood facilities.
 - Assisted local school districts with their pre-kindergarten developmental screenings.

Rationale for Redesign of PSY 756

- As noted previously, this course included a number of “hands on” activities to help students apply material. However, these experiences felt disjointed, and didn’t appear to help students to really comprehend the entire picture of working with Early Childhood populations.
- Additionally, only selected students are able to work with Early Childhood populations at their practicum sites (local school districts). So, not all of the students are able to fully apply their knowledge in systematic, organized ways.

Project Purpose

The purpose of this teaching project was to redesign course assignments/material to increase students’ ability to apply their knowledge to a “real” case.

Redesign Description

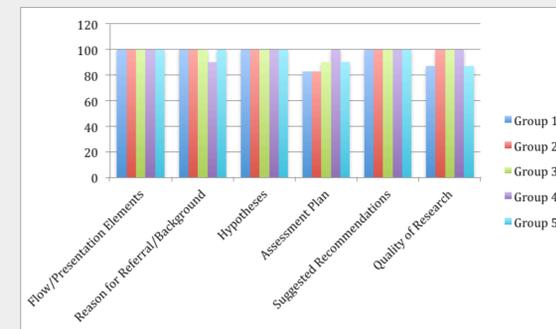
After participating in the summer Learning by Design course, PSY 756 was re-configured in four ways:

1. Increase in case-based learning: Each lecture “module” was shortened, and concluded with an in-class case analysis.
2. Formal Activation of Information from Previous Coursework: Students prepared a presentation on developmental skills and selected readings on a controversial topic. For example, students were asked to present on early childhood development within the Social Emotional domain, and chose to assign a reading on discipline.
3. New Material: The instructor developed new learning materials to help students better contextualize early childhood education; including more information about the diverse nature of how children are served in early childhood settings.
4. Decreasing in-class lecture time: Due to the addition of more in-class activities, lectures were pared down to the most important, “need to know” ideas.
 - Important licensure information was covered through readings and a “mid-semester review” to test student knowledge of these basic facts.

Formal Results: Case Conceptualization Skills

To test the outcomes of these four redesign changes, student case conceptualization skills were formally evaluated at the end of the semester. This skill, commonly referred to as “case conceptualization” is highly valued and therefore developed within our program.

- Students were given a partial case and asked to present their analysis in pairs.
- To evaluate their skills, I used a rubric we commonly use in School Psychology courses, tailored specifically to Early Childhood Assessment.
- Below is a chart summarizing each group’s performance across the six different rubric areas. Because each rubric area was worth differing amounts of points, the values below are summarized as percentages of the total points possible earned by each group.



Informal Results: End-of-Semester Student Evaluations

- When reviewing the end-of-semester student evaluations for this redesigned semester of PSY 756, a couple of themes emerged:
 1. Students appreciated the variety of learning approaches, and felt the course was balanced.
 2. Students reported that the case analyses throughout the semester challenged them to more fully engage with the material (although they were frustrated at times).
 3. Students liked hearing from their peers on developmental domain presentations.

Discussion & Future Directions

- Generally, I was pleased with the changes I made to this course as part of this redesign project.
- In terms of future plans, I think I will continue to implement the major changes (development learning and building case conceptualization skills) in future semesters.
- Specific to case conceptualization, I would like to further improve both my instruction and assessment of student learning within this area. For example:
 1. Complete a better pre-test of student case conceptualization skills.
 2. Assess early childhood assessment case conceptualization skills *after the course is over*, in the “real world.”
 3. Develop methods to help students routinize their approach to assessment planning (without encouraging a “cookbook approach.”

Conclusions

Overall, it appears that this redesign has had a positive impact on student learning and experience. Specifically, student performance was strong on a key assessment, and both the instructor and students report perceived benefits of the changes.

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