

## Stories of Assessment Episode One

Kate McCormick, Childhood/Early Childhood Department

Interviewers: Krystal Barber and Melinda Shimiuz

We want to welcome you to our stories of assessment podcast series. Thank you for joining us. Our goal is for faculty to learn from other faculty about specific strategies for assessment they tried. Especially in light of the fact that many of us have had to change our strategies due to the shift to online hybrid learning environments. Welcome.

**(Music)**

**KB:** So Kate, first we'd like to start out, if you could just introduce yourself and maybe give us a little bit of background information regarding what you teach here at Cortland.

**KM:** Sure. So my name is Dr. Kate McCormick. I'm an assistant professor in Childhood/Early Childhood Education. I specialize in Early Childhood Education so I primarily teach a course that's titled EDU 331- Integrated Curriculum Development for Young Children. And that course has four student learning outcomes and so today I am going to talk about one of those outcomes and how it connects to an assessment strategy I use.

**MS:** Perfect. What was your motivation for choosing the assessment strategy that you're going to share today?

**KM:** So, what I'm going to share today is a scaffolded peer review of a creativity lesson plan. So, my course is one of the first courses in our students' teacher prep program where they write a formal, structured lesson plan. So, lesson planning is very new to them and I was finding when, in the past few years that we've done this, I was finding students were making the same mistakes or they were leaving out details in the same places. So, that sort of made me think, okay there's something I'm doing that's not clear enough so that's really where this peer review came from. I wanted students to really think critically about how they were lesson planning on their own sort of lesson plans and by thinking critically, they were doing a peer review to then provide feedback to others.

**KB:** Okay, sounds good. So it sounds like you had a really specific issue that you were addressing which was this idea of them needing to be more reflective and critical. Can you spend a few minutes just describing the strategy that you implemented?

**KM:** Sure. So, the students, the final product is a polished lesson plan. What I did to get them to that point is to do a structured peer review. An anonymous peer review, so in, should I talk about pre-covid/post-covid?

**KB:** That would be good. Yes. That would be actually really helpful if you could talk about

**KM:** Okay

**KB:** if you had to switch things up.

**KM:** So, I implemented this strategy two years ago. Fall 2019, so that was in person, we were in the usual time and I had students do the peer review in class. So I took the whole 75 minute class period to do it. I realized that when we shifted to covid teaching online, I couldn't replicate that. So, I created it as a part of our weekly modules for the online portion and that really, it gave them much more time to do the scaffolded peer review. I found that the quality of review

was higher by doing this in the offline space. They could ask questions when they wanted. They could also decide when they wanted to do the review itself. So I really found that shifting it to offline produced a higher quality review. Where I structure the review itself is I give students a very structured peer review feedback form. The form is two pages and it has questions where the questions are oriented in such a way that it identifies where common mistakes happen so they have to look at the lesson plan they are reviewing and identify is this student, are their objectives smart, do they meet that sort of formula that we have. Have they identified a documentation plan that is clear and includes modifications? So, by sort of forcing them to review someone else's paper and look for these common mistakes, I found that they were then editing their own lessons with the feedback that they were giving to other students.

**MS:** That's great.

**KM:** Post-covid, I really enjoy doing it offline and I will continue doing that probably from here on out.

**KB:** I have a question. So you said that it was anonymous, that you decided to make the feedback anonymous. Is there a reason you decided to do that?

**KM:** Yes. I should be more clear. The lesson plans that the reviewer receives are anonymous. The feedback provided has the student's name on it. So they do have to identify themselves when they send back the feedback. That was important to me. I think it creates more trust between a reviewer and the author and it sort of also helps the reviewer sort of develop constructive, helpful criticism because that was another key component of this. So the lesson plans are anonymous. The students reviewing don't know who they are reviewing, but the feedback is, has a name on it.

**KB:** And, do you, just one other follow up question. Do you think you could give an example? I think its really, one of the most important things that you talked about is how its scaffolded, like how you helped them sort of hone in on what to look for. Could you give an example of how you maybe scaffold that?

**KM:** Sure. So, one of the things I teach before we do this is writing objectives, identifying best fit standards and aligning assessment methods. So, in my mind, it seems very clear. Like you have an objective, you have a standard, but that was where I was finding a lot of mistakes happening. Students were, they'd have three objectives and then two forms of assessment. It has to be one-to-one. So, one of the questions is "are there an equal number of objectives and standards and assessments and are they clearly aligned with one another?" I'll provide a lot of resources to help them do the feedback. So, I give them a high quality sample lesson that demonstrates all the things I'm looking for. I also give them a slides walk through that breaks down each box on the lesson plan that says "this is how you answer this part", "this is how you answer this part", and so that sort of creates that like really thoughtful examination of the author's lesson plan.

**MS:** So how did you find the strategy impacted student learning in the class?

**KM:** So there were a few things I found. One was that by requiring them to answer these very structured questions, it improved their lesson plan drafts. So while they were giving feedback, they were helping someone else improve their writing, but they were also taking that and putting it into their own writing. I also shared this strategy in a way that I modeled how this can actually be done in early childhood classrooms. Peer review is a common teaching practice so I have them reflect after they do the peer review on how they could use this teaching strategy in their own classrooms. And that part was really important because while their doing the learning in the peer review, I

also want them to be thinking about their future teaching practice and how this strategy could be applied in that classroom.

**KB:** Okay, great. And so you may have talked about this a little bit already, but have you found that even the difference between like pre-covid and post-covid and sort of shifting it to more of a self-paced activity that they do, has it impacted your own teaching in this area at all?

**KM:** Yes. In the sense that it's allowed me to sort of reclaim time that I would have given a class period, time that I usually would be doing application, conversation, discussion, so I can reclaim that. And also, in my own time that I designate for like grading and teaching, I can reclaim some of that time because in the past I was doing individual consultations and I can have up to sixty students a semester so sixty individual consultations was taking a lot of my time. So by shifting it to where peers are providing that sort of help and feedback, I then can shift my attention to other types of, you know, more deep feedback on the final project or helping as needed.

**KB:** Have you gotten any like informal feedback from the students about how they feel about the process?

**KM:** I'm still trying to figure out how to best do this because the way I have it set up know, students send me their lesson plans, I give them a number, an anonymous number, and then I send that lesson plan to the reviewers. So the amount of email this requires is kind of high. And students who write back, they say "thanks", you know, "let me know if I need to change anything". But I haven't, that would be something to consider for the future, is like getting sort of a gauge of what students think of it. That piece is missing.

**KB:** Okay

**MS:** Alright. What would you suggest to a colleague who might want to try a similar strategy in their own classroom?

**KM:** So, scaffolded peer review I think can be used for many different purposes. I use it specifically for lesson plans, but essay writing, project development, case studies, I think there's a lot of ways you could apply this strategy. I find it really helpful in the education classroom because in thinking about teaching as sort of a collaborative profession, I want them maybe thinking about how they can work with others and deepen learning and extend their teaching practice.

**KB:** So, I totally agree. I think the scaffolded piece of it is like the most critical part that could definitely be applied across many different areas. One question I guess that we would have for anyone who's listening is what resources might you suggest, or you know, when you were thinking about how you might scaffold it, you could even talk about that a little bit. Like how you went about choosing how to scaffold, what to focus on, and or you know what any sort of resources that you might've used that other people could access and use.

**KM:** Sure. So I can definitely share the feedback form that I have for this assignment. I took a lot of time in organizing it so that it's brief. It's only two pages. I also thought about what criterion I wanted to use, so rather than just saying like yeah this is good and this is bad, I wanted there to be more helpful, right, feedback so the columns I have for the feedback are "meets expectations", "developing", or "incomplete". And so, then I have on the form, if you wrote, if you gave a score of developing or incomplete, you need to provide written feedback for what the author should do to improve so I was very purposeful and I didn't want it to just be a check box that the student gives back. So I'm happy to share my feedback form for others. I also looked at edutopia. So

edutopia is a website I often go to when I'm just sort of thinking through something. They have a lot of different teaching strategies. They're often aimed for a K-12 setting, but you know as an education professor, I can, I really enjoy making them flexible and applying them into my education classroom. So I used edutopia to find out more about peer review.

**KB:** Okay great. Yeah, that sounds really good. You talked about, well I guess, okay, so here's one more question. So you talked about how, even though, moving it online, you know, you could you could potentially move this to an in person activity again, but I think you talked about how you probably won't do that.

**KM:** Yes. So I've found our students, I'm thinking in their minds, but sometimes they experience anxiety in timed activities and so by saying you have to complete two peer reviews in seventy-five minutes, some rushed through it and didn't really take the time to think about the feedback they are providing, and then some couldn't finish because they were providing such deep feedback. So I shifted it online to really make it lower stakes and improve the quality of feedback.

**KB:** Okay, great.

**MS:** Right, because we've talked about, so for kind of how the students are assessing each other's work, but how do you tie this back to assessing the SLO for your course.

**KM:** Right. So the SLO that this assessment is aligned to is the second one, which is developing integrated curriculum, it's a longer SLO than that, that's the sort of brief of it, so I align this assessment strategy to that SLO. The peer review is complete, incomplete, so that's how I grade it, but the process of doing the feedback and the review, I see in the final project, which is their lesson plan. So this midway assessment is how I sort of gauge a temperature on how well they're doing to get to that final polished lesson plan.

**MS:** In meeting that second SLO?

**KM:** Yes.

**MS:** Excellent.

**KM:** There are several things in my class that meet that second SLO, so this is a partial way that they meet that.

**KB:** Yeah, and I could really see how this process, it helps the peer, it helps them as a reviewer to give feedback to their partner, their peer, but I can really see it you know sparks their own idea about oh did i do that in my own lesson. maybe I need to go back and do that. So I can really see how it's, you know, it's doubly helpful for them in terms of reaching that outcome.

**KM:** Yeah.

**KB:** Okay, great. Well thank you so much Kate for talking with us today, we really appreciate it.

**MS:** Yes. Thank you.

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