Stories of Assessment Episode Three
Helena Baert, Physical Education
Interviewers: Krystal Barber and Jolie Roat

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, we want to welcome you to our third episode of our podcast series called "Stories of Assessment". My name is Krystal Barber and I'm from the Childhood/Early Childhood Education Department.

JR: And I'm Jolie Roat from the Mathematics Department. We're here today with Helena Baert from the Physical Education Department. Welcome, Helena.

HB: Thank you so much. Happy to be here.

JR: To start, Helena, could you please introduce yourself? Give us some background information regarding what you teach here at Cortland?

HB: Yes. Hi. I have been at SUNY Cortland since 2011 and I teach in the Physical Education Department. I teach in the undergraduate program and the graduate program and I'm currently the graduate coordinator. The courses that I'm usually focusing on is movement education for undergraduates, outdoor adventure for undergraduates and then technology for graduates and some leadership classes depending on the need.

KB: Okay, great. And so, can you just start by telling us a little bit about the assessment strategy you'll share with us today?

HB: Yes. I guess my strategy is "less is more" and so it's not necessarily a specific tool, it's more of a mindset based from the experiences that we've gone through in the last year and a half. And what I mean by "less is more" is to kind of reinvent assessment depending upon the outcomes that were in my syllabus, keeping things true to those outcomes but also considering the challenges that our students go through and the challenges that we as faculty have gone through.

KB: Okay. So, can you say just a little bit more about that. Maybe your motivation for choosing that strategy?

HB: Yeah, so, when the pandemic hit in the spring, we had to, I think we kept doing what we did, all our courses were put online and everything was going pretty well. We were doing tests and assessment traditionally but then put it online and we found that either the students were looking at their resources, so there were integrity issues, but also that they had a hard time, and a difficult time, to expressing themselves through writing online and when that semester was open, or was done, I really needed to do something about rethinking about my time line. What was important for them to know from that class? And so, in the summer, we really reinvented it and looked at each assessment to see if it was appropriate for virtual learning or not because we have classes that are on campus or virtual, and then if we could enhance it by making it more authentic based on the situation that they're at. Also, giving them flexibility as far as being able to test at any time, being able to address our outcomes, and being able to address the fact that everything was new to

them: technology was new, you know, the screen time had an effect. So, just thinking about all the challenges that the pandemic gave them and myself in that, and really looking at: what is the nitty gritty? What do I want them to know moving forward? And how do I test that in an authentic way?

JR: That's great. Could you maybe give an example of what this "less is more" would look like in a class?

HB: Yeah, so I have done, obviously, there's many different ways you could do this. One example was instead of giving paper or written tests, I do verbal exams and tests. So I just ask questions in break-out rooms, one-on-one. And, of course with that, I make sure I practice it with the students so that they know what's expected. And they have all the questions in advance so they can prepare them. They don't necessarily know what the specificness is of, like in my case, it was skill-based, so they had different skills like skipping, hopping, and I asked them various questions on that. That's one example. Another one would be the video-based short challenges that I did, where in one minute they would have to address a skill, physical skill, or a knowledge, where they would talk about it, and they would have to do that in a minute. So they had to kind of put together something that would articulate the content. They would have to understand the content- it was not just remembering or reading. It was an application-based assignment and they would have to do it under one minute. So, they had to really understand and be able to apply that content. And with those challenges and the questionnaires, they were very short. So it was easy to just see, do they know it or do they not know it? For me to evaluate, you know, after a few minutes, I would know and I could give them feedback, and then I could say "we're going to have to redo it", or "you're not ready", or "you're good", you know, "you did really well". And they gave an opportunity to have that conversation with the student and say "I needed to go back, study this a little more, do this again, this is what I really need." And I think the students appreciated that back and forth. It was very, I guess, individualized and specific to what I wanted them to know.

KB: Okay, yeah. That sounds really useful. I really like how you talk about how it's really application-based and so they are sort of, you know, using those skills and applying their knowledge to what they're learning in class. Do you think this is something you will try again in the fall if we go back to in-person learning?

HB: Yeah. I think there is several benefits to students using video that I hadn't thought about before. So, for example, when you think about teaching, and having them just teach one task in advance, they have to prepare it in a different way. They're usually in front of a screen, not in front of their peers, they're less embarrassed to do something like that, or they're just with me, you know, in the room. So, it allows for that check for understanding before they may have to do it in the classroom or with preschoolers, for example. So, I think it's a really nice strategy. The verbal exam, I actually have done this in person in a senior level class where we do it with audio recordings, and that worked really well, too, because it's actually pretty easy to assess and to grade afterward as well. It's just, you know, when you think about teacher education, because I'm in teacher education, you want the students to be able to articulate, and show, demonstrate, their skills and knowledge. So, the video and the verbal challenges, they fit well with the context in which they are supposed to be learning and they will continue to eventually teach. So that, I like that part, so I definitely can see benefits to keep going with certain ones. Which ones, you know, like I really like the verbal exams and the challenges, either to prepare them or to exchange them. We'll kind of see how the fall goes.

JR: Sounds great. It sounds like it's had a really positive impact on student learning in the

course as well.

HB: Yeah. I mean, I think we're going to do a little survey. I always do a survey at the end, to see what they really liked and what they didn't like, and this time we're actually checking to see "what did you like that you would like us to continue to do?" So I'm looking forward to asking those questions to see, and I probably will kind of tell them what, you know, what do you like, what don't you like, but the relationship part, I think, is so powerful. There's no hiding. There's no hiding, it's just you and me, let's talk. I want to see your knowledge. Just let me know. And I can be as flexible and as individual as I want, which is nice because every student is different. So, some students, this may be a really difficult time, and I'm going to give them, you know, some options, and some students, I can challenge them, you know. We don't, we just always teach to the middle, but with this, I have this range where I'm like taking the students where they're at, and hopefully bringing them up, empowering them, to be, you know, to know more, to be more prepared as a teacher.

KB: That's great. It almost sounds like you're using it as a way to differentiate instruction to students but also to be flexible in the way that you're assessing your learning in the course. How has this strategy, maybe, this overall, broader idea of "less is more", or the individual ideas and strategies you talked about, how have those impacted your own teaching and how might they impact your teaching moving forward?

HB: Yeah. I think it's made teaching and learning more visible, which is, I think, really good. Especially with the video challenges. The neat thing about the video challenges is not only do they make a video, but they share their video with other students. So, some students may not be starters. They may be more constructivists. They want to see, what are other people doing. I don't really understand that. So, I give examples but then other students will start doing it, and then they can look at those examples and that has really impacted teaching and learning because it's not just about me. Now I can say, "Look at Jolie's one. She did a really nice job engaging with the students in the video". And, you know, it's more of a collaborative effort and a personal effort, if that makes sense. It has both potential outcomes, which I like a lot. And, it's authentic which is, you know, what the purpose is of teaching.

JR: Would you have any suggestions or resources that you might point a colleague to who would be interested in trying something like this?

HB: Yeah. Let me, resources, what I'd say, the first thing, start small. Look at your outcomes and every context is different. So, me doing this is saying these are some of my examples, is within my context. You know, talking to people who have done some of this stuff. Talking to your peers in your context to see how can we assess differently, more authentically, to make sure that students, you know, are able to give you the knowledge and the skills that they've acquired within our context. As far as technology, the biggest thing that I had to learn was video technology and helping my students make those videos. I just found in one class, one of the students actually said "I've been using this app. It's awesome. It's actually so easy." And as soon as then I tried the app, and it was really good, and all the students are using it. So, making tutorials. So, that's where the technical part kind of comes in too, so maybe our instructional designers would be helpful in that area. But, I think asking your students is also a really important thing, I think. "How would you like to show me your learning?" That's a good question to ask the students. They may not know, but when you're thinking about it for next semester, it may be a good question to ask now, for next semester, to see, you know, "would this be something you think you would like to do", or "how can you show me that you have these skills, that you can demonstrate them?" I really didn't

think about video and just showing simple skill demonstration on video, for example, how to use a compass. You know, like usually I'm right there with them. "Show me", and "do a task", and "give me the solutions". Well, here they actually show me to put the camera on top and show me how to use the compass. And it was so neat to see them do that. You can also do this, you know, in a break out room. Yeah. "Show me what you got." But, working with your peers within your context, starting with the outcomes, start small, pick one thing, don't change all your assessments. Just pick one thing. That's what happened with me as well. There's lots of support on campus for anything technical, so reach out.

KB: Great. Thank you so much, Helena, for joining us today and we really appreciate all of the ideas and strategies you had to share.

JR: Yes.

HB: Yeah, you're welcome. And if anybody has questions about it, feel free to contact me. I'm always willing to help.

KB: Great. Thank you.

JR: Thanks.

HB: Thank you.

(Music)