TRANSPARENT ASSIGNMENTS PROMOTE EQUITABLE OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

Janet W. Steverson
Douglas K. Newell Professor of Law
and Dean of Diversity and Inclusion
November 27, 2018

License

- Materials adapted from a Transparency in Learning and Teaching (TILT) presentation pursuant to the following creative commons license.
- https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/deed.en_US

Overview

PURPOSE OF WORKSHOP: ***Why*** *are we doing this?*

–To learn how transparently designed assignments can offer equitable opportunities for all students to succeed.

–Consider possible applications in your courses.

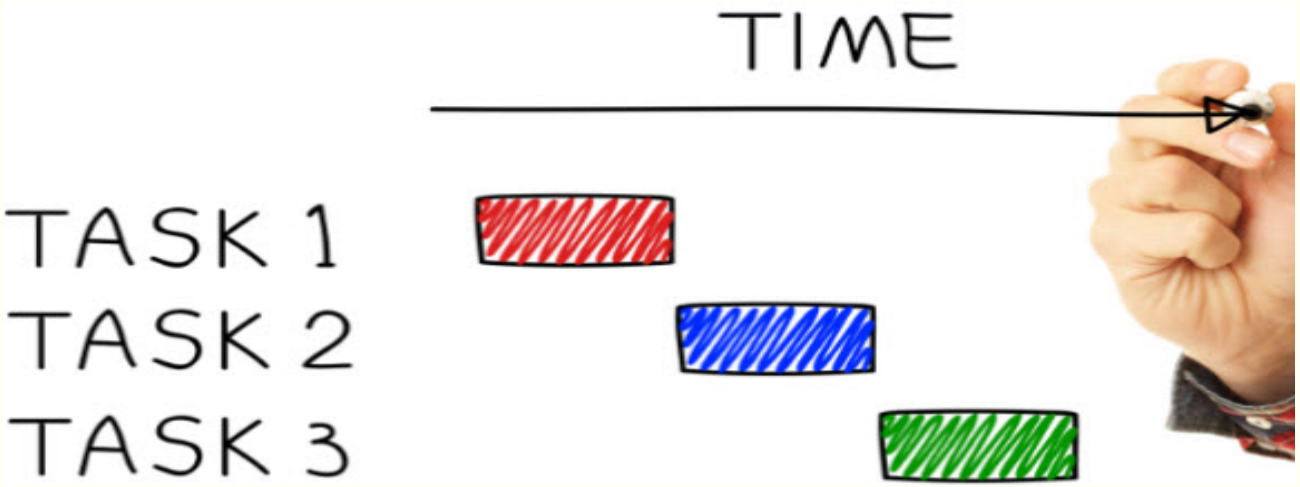
Overview

TASKS: ***How** are we doing this?*

–Review: summary of research findings.

–Learn: how to use transparency in assignments.

–Practice: applying transparency in your own course.



Overview

CRITERIA: ***What*** *are the characteristics of excellent work?*

We will leave with

–An understanding of TILT research and

–Strategies (draft) for applying transparency in assignments.

What is Transparency?

What is Transparency?

- Transparent teaching and learning methods explicitly focus on *why* and *how* students are learning course content in particular ways.
- They also focus on *what* should be the outcome of the students' work.

Why Transparency?

EQUITY OF ACCESS

EQUITY OF EXPERIENCE

Transparent and Problem-centered Learning Project

- A collaboration between the Association of American Colleges and Universities and the TILT Higher Ed Project—2014-2015 academic year
  - –7 MSIs [minority-serving institutions], 1800 students, 35 faculty
  - •425 First generation students
  - •402 non-white students
  - •479 low-income students
  - •297 multiracial students
- –A simple teaching intervention done 2 times (2 assignments).
- –Boosted students' learning in 3 important ways (medium-large effect for underserved students):
  - •Academic confidence
  - •Sense of belonging
  - •Skills valued most by employers

Benefits of Transparency

- ***All*** of our students benefit if we do not hide the ball regarding *why* we are giving the assignment, *how* the student should do the assignment, and *what* the characteristics are of excellent work.

- Our ***underserved students*** benefit the most. Thus, transparency helps to level the playing field for many of these students .

What Does Transparent Assignment Design Look Like

Faculty/Instructors agreed (in national study) to discuss with students in advance:

- **<u>Purpose (Why?)</u>**
  - **What skills will students practice?**
  - **What knowledge will students gain?**
  - **Why will they need these skills and this knowledge?**
- **<u>Task (How?)</u>**
  - **What activities will students do?**
  - **How will the students do the activities?**
- **<u>Criteria for success (What?)</u>**
  - **What does Excellence look like (annotated examples)?**
  - **Provide Criteria in advance so students can self-evaluate.**

Research on Learning	Implications for Transparent Design
Elbow, Jaschik/Davidson, Mazur Ambrose, Bergstahler Gregorc, Kolb	Low stakes for greater creativity / risk Varied and/or flexible formats appeal equitably to students' strengths; inclusive.
Bass, Bloom, Colomb, Felder, Perry	Build critical thinking skills in intentional sequence. Target feedback to phase, don't overwhelm.
Doyle, Felder, Tanner, Winkelmes	Specify pertinent knowledge/skills, criteria and encourage self-monitoring
Fisk/Light, Tanner	Provide annotated examples of successful work w/ criteria applied, before students begin work
Aronson, Dweck, Fisk, Light, Schnabel, Spitzer, Steele, Treisman, Yeager/Walton, Vygosky	Structure and require peer instruction, feedback; positive attribution activities.
AAC&U Finley/McNair (HIP, P-B) Winkelmes et al Yeager, Walton	Explicate purposes, tasks, criteria in advance. Give students a compass, set expectations; Explicate applicability, relevance; Engage students in applying shared criteria to increase belonging.

Apply all that research to designing transparent, equitable assignments

- 1. The "Transparent Assignment Template"
- 2. Examples of Less Transparent Assignments and Examples of More Transparent Assignments

Gather Feedback on Your Own Assignment

Why are we doing this now?

Purpose:

–Knowledge: share feedback, insights

–Skills: apply transparency; engage community of practice

Task:

–Four steps, 4 - 6 min each, in pairs or 3s

Criteria:

–a draft you can use in your course

–helpful insights from colleagues as novices

SIT NEXT TO A DISCIPLINARY STRANGER(S)

Choose an Assignment from One of Your Courses

- Choose either an assignment or, if you do not give assignments, an exam.
- It should be an assignment or an exam that you give after students are acquainted with the basic tools and terminology that the course uses.
- Preferably it is given when students are starting to apply the basic tools and terminology that they have learned in class.
- Describe this assignment to a partner (2 min each).

Feedback on Your Assignments (Part 1 of 3)

As a "novice student," offer feedback on the Purpose of the assignment—In pairs or 3s, discuss and define the "purpose" of each other's assignment (6 min total).

Specifically, five years after taking your course,

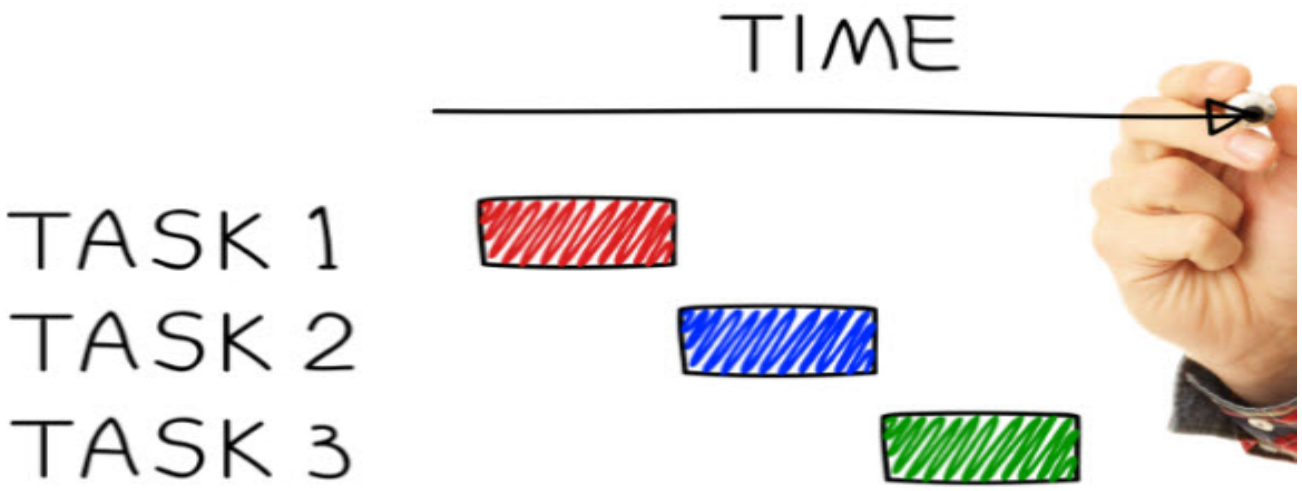
- What essential **knowledge** should students retain from doing this assignment?
- What **skills** should students be able to perform from doing this assignment? Why are these important to students?

Feedback on Your Assignments (Part 2 of 3)

As a "novice student," offer feedback on the <u>Task</u>

--In pairs or 3s, discuss and define the activities that you, as a student, should do or perform for this assignment (6 min total).

--If relevant, list the sequence of the steps that you would take to complete the assignment.



Feedback on Your Assignments (Part 3 of 3)

As a novice student, offer feedback on the Criteria for Success.

In pairs or 3s, discuss and define the characteristics of an excellent finished product. (6 min total)

As a novice:

- Are you confident you are doing the task effectively?
- Are you confident you are doing excellent work?
- Do you have annotated good examples?

To answer yes, what would you need?

TRANSPARENT ASSIGNMENTS PROMOTE EQUITABLE OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENT SUCCESS