Student Perceptions of the Exploration Project's Open House: Two Grounded Theories

Amanda O. Latz
Ball State University

Author's Contact Information

Amanda O. Latz, Doctoral Candidate
Ball State University
513 South Tara Lane,
Muncie, IN 47304, USA,
Phone: (828) 302-4800,
email: amandaolatz@gmail.com

Abstract:

This study explored student perceptions of a performance assessment: the Exploration Project's (EP) Open House. The EP was a part of an introductory Cultural Anthropology class at Midwestern Community College (pseudonym) and consisted of three parts: a paper, an in-class presentation, and a public Open House event. Descriptive feedback was provided from former students of the class who participated in an interview with their former instructor (also the researcher). Through a constructivist grounded theory analytical approach, two major themes were generated during the data analysis, which led to the creation of two grounded theories.

Key Words:

Performance assessment, community college students, grounded theory, faculty inquiry.

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore student perceptions of a public performance assessment used in an Introduction to Cultural Anthropology (ANT 123 [pseudonym]) course at Midwestern Community College (MCC [pseudonym]), an institution located within the United States. During the fall 2007, spring 2008, and fall 2008 semesters, students completed a three-pronged capstone assignment entitled The Exploration Project (EP) which involved a public Open House event. The purpose of the assignment was to complete a project within one of three areas: 1) the Cultural Exploration in which students explored a culture (e.g., Hell's Angels) or an element of culture (e.g., the cultural influences of the Harry Potter series in the United States), 2) the Family Tree in which students explored various cultural elements of their family (family as defined by the student), or 3) the Place History in which students explored the cultural history of a particular place (e.g., town, park, building).

The first assessed and graded component of the EP was a written paper. Next was a brief in-class presentation of the work to provide an overview of the EP. Finally, each student participated in an Open House event whereby members of the community were invited to engage in discussion with students about their EPs. The in-class presentations and Open House events took place during the same three-hour class period. Two Open House events were scheduled toward the end of the semester and half of the class was scheduled for each session. There were approximately 30 students in each class. Students each created a display area which included items of their choosing such as: tri-fold poster boards, artifacts, videos, photographs, collages, and so on. Each in-class presentation was five minutes in length at maximum, and the Open House lasted approximately one hour. Here, it is important to note two items about the project's history: first, during the 2006-2007 academic year, the EP was a part of the class, but did not consist of an Open House and second, options two and three (above) were added to the EP in the fall of 2008.

The guiding research question for this study was: How did students experience the EP events and the Open House, specifically? To assess the value of course learning activities, student perceptions of their own learning should be obtained. In this study, student perceptions of their own learning were brought forth through an exploration of their experiences with the EP events. Through in-depth interviews, students were encouraged to engage in a version of descriptive feedback (Rodgers, 2006). This report outlines the findings and grounded theories generated from interviews conducted with students who were involved in the EP events.

Conceptual Framework

This section focuses on three areas which undergird the study: 1) the scholarship of teaching and learning, the literature to which this study contributes, 2) faculty inquiry and student voice, the literature base which underpins the rationale for the design of this study, and 3) performance assessment, the pedagogical strategy employed during the ANT 123 course.

Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

Since Ernest Boyer's seminal work (1990) and coining of the term scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL), many faculty have engaged in research as teacher/researchers. This study is an example. Prior to Boyer's book, teaching and learning as research was conducted, written about, and considered; however, since Boyer's work, the field has blossomed considerably. Specifically, the Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, which was launched in 1998, brought teaching and learning to the forefront of many scholars' research agendas (The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2009). Definitions, uses, and meanings assigned to the SoTL have evolved considerably over time, and debates continue (McKinney, 2007). McKinney noted: "Scholarly teaching involves taking a scholarly approach to teaching just as we would take a scholarly approach to other areas of knowledge and practice" (p. 9). Scholarly teaching is similar to reflective teaching. Brookfield (2006) stated that "when our teaching is determined by an unthinking subscription to professional norms, or an uncritical mimicking of the behaviors of teachers we encountered in our own lives, our chances of helping our students learn are severely reduced" (p. 25). However, scholarly teaching does not constitute the SoTL in and of itself. McKinney explained: "The scholarship of teaching and learning goes beyond scholarly teaching and involves systematic study of teaching and/or learning and the public sharing and review of such work through presentations, publications or performances" (p. 10). This study adds to the current SoTL literature available on college teaching and the use of performance assessment.

Faculty Inquiry and Student Voice

Specifically, this study is a form of faculty inquiry, which is a version of professional development that falls under the large umbrella of the SoTL movement. It is necessary for instructors to generate and explore questions regarding their teaching to engage in SoTL work. The research question guiding the present study is an example. Answers to teaching questions can be found in sundry locations. Students are a vital source of information. Huber (2008) explicated:

> The core work of faculty inquiry involves instructors asking questions about the teaching and learning that goes on in their own classrooms, then seeking answers by consulting the literature, gathering and analyzing evidence, and engaging students in the process whenever possible. Instructors then use what they find out to improve the experience of their students and share this work with colleagues so that they and their students can benefit too. (p. 8)

Through the use of interviews with students, this study provided students with a voice regarding their perceptions of the EP. As such, faculty inquiry has the potential to spark new pedagogical approaches that better serve students. This type of questioning can reframe classrooms and teaching spaces as places of possibility. It can be "a way of breaking out of subservience to pedagogical routines that are not serving teachers or students well" (Huber, 2008, p. 11). Faculty inquiry can empower instructors and students to become actively engaged in constructing new ways of knowing.

As stated above, to understand processes of teaching and learning, the voices of learners must be heard. Bueschel (2008) stated:

Just as students benefit when the instructor makes clear how the course material is relevant to their lives, so too do faculty benefit when they have opportunities to understand more deeply the teaching and learning processes in their own classrooms. Students have a role to play in this work. (p. 14)

Not only can learner voices add to what is known about teaching and learning, but giving learners the opportunity to reflect upon and articulate their learning processes can be a form of metacognition that promotes further learning. Bueschel noted:

It is clear that involving students in the inquiry process, not just as subjects or objects, but also as participants, has tremendous potential. There are cognitive and metacognitive skills that students can learn and master. And there are clear signs that *just being asked* helps students think about their own learning and how they can succeed. (p. 16, italics in original)

Performance Assessment

Performance assessment, which can be seen as one form of authentic assessment, takes many forms. This method of assessment places students in real-world contexts. For example, students within a culinary arts course may be required to cater a meal for a local charity. Students would facilitate all aspects of the project such as planning, preparing, cooking, and serving. Additional broad examples are: Socratic seminars, constructed response items, essays, writing, oral discourse, exhibitions, laboratory experiments, and portfolios (Feuer & Fulton, 1993; Johnson, 1996). In essence, performance assessment requires students to "demonstrate, in a meaningful way, what they know and are able to do" (Montgomery, 2002, p. 35). This method of assessment stands in stark contrast to methods which require students to provide evidence of fact memorization. Performance assessment is "supposed to focus on tasks calling for complex thinking, deep understanding of subject matter, and open-ended responses" (Baker, 1997, p. 248).

Darling-Hammond (1994) noted that performance assessments "can provide teachers with much more useful classroom information as they engage teachers in evaluating how and what students know and can do in real-life performance situations" (p. 6). Despite this, the evaluation component of performance assessment can be challenging. Rubrics are helpful in articulating the evaluation criteria (for both students and teachers) and demystifying the evaluation process as such assessments can be "difficult to score objectively" (Shepherd & Mullane, 2008). It is important to note that "criteria must be known in advance by students so that they can apply them as they work through the process to arrive at the desired product" (Montgomery, 2002, p. 35). To evaluate the EP exhibitions, a rubric was used which collapsed the in-class presentation and the Open House performance of each student into one grade [see Appendix A].

Performance assessment has been used widely at the postsecondary level. In fact, some institutions of higher education have shifted toward an emphasis on performance assessment (e.g., Alverno College, 2009). Much of the current performance assessment literature explores the method's efficacy in teacher preparation programs (e.g., Darling-Hammond & Snyder, 2000; Pecheone, Pigg, Chung & Souviney, 2005; Stiggins & Bridgeford, 1985). However, performance assessment has vast potential for

student learning and can be implemented in a variety of disciplinary contexts. As noted previously, the purpose of this study is to explore student perceptions of a public performance assessment used in an Introduction to Cultural Anthropology course at MCC.

Subjectivities Statement and Theoretical Underpinnings

As the teacher/researcher who completed this project, it is important to note that within this context, my orientation to teaching is inextricably linked to my orientation to research. I have spent a great deal of time considering my own personal philosophy of education. To give a precise and concrete explanation of my teaching philosophy would be impossible. It is fluid and constantly changing as I continuously sort through new information as it arrives. This process of sorting, analyzing, and connecting to teaching is most often unconscious. As Donald

Schön (1987) described, it is a process of reflection in action (RIA) and reflection on that RIA. My teaching philosophy changes all the time. Despite this, I can identify four strands of pedagogical literature that have markedly and consistently influenced my orientations to teaching and learning. For me, each of these strands operates under the overarching perspective of critical pedagogy. The strands are: 1) adult education theory (e.g., Taylor, Marienau, & Fiddler, 2000), 2) K-12 gifted education and differentiation specifically (e.g., Tomlinson, 1999), 3) creative inquiry (e.g., Clemson University, 2009), and 4) feminist pedagogy (e.g., hooks, 1994; 2003). A complete review of the details of each of these individual sub-strands is beyond the scope of this paper.

As mentioned above, these strands are woven together by the threads of critical pedagogy. Specifically, I am greatly influenced by the work of Paulo Freire (1970). Freire explained the "banking" system of education whereby students are passive vessels to be filled by their teachers. He critiqued this orientation: "The more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world" (Freire, 1970, p. 73). Both Freire and bell hooks, who has been both largely influenced by and critical of Freirean thought, asserted that the purpose of education must be liberatory, not oppressive. The goal is to push students toward the development of a critical consciousness and to enable them to be liberated through education. I ascribe to this orientation to teaching and learning through decentralizing power, encouraging students to create their own new knowledge, and viewing students as valuable and capable human beings. Because I have conducted this study as a teacher/researcher, my theoretical orientation to teaching was also my orientation to this research endeavor.

Methods

A qualitative design was employed for this study. A semi-structured open-ended interview protocol (Spradley, 1979) [see Appendix B] was used to engage students in conversation regarding their experiences with the EP and the Open House element specifically. It is important to note here that this study was approved by MCC's Office of Institutional Research and the Institutional Review Board of my home institution. Students provided me, their former instructor, with a version of descriptive feedback

(Rodgers, 2006) regarding their perceptions of the performance assessment used in our class. Rodgers explained descriptive feedback as

> neither in-the-moment nor formalized research but a conversation between a teacher and his or her students. In such conversations, students describe their cognitive and affective responses as learners, relative to a specific learning experience or group of experiences, with the goals of serving their learning, deepening trust between teacher and student, and among students, and establishing a vibrant, creative community on a daily basis. (p. 212)

I perceive my interviews with my students as descriptive feedback because I viewed our interviews as conversations and as extensions of our time together in class. While these conversations were not during our semesters together, when they were enrolled in my class, a learning-centered relationship still exists between us. These relationships are the rationale for why I refer to our interactions as a version of descriptive feedback.

Participants

Recruitment of participants took place early in the spring 2009 semester. All students who were enrolled in ANT 123 during the fall 2007, spring 2008, and fall 2008 semesters and who were enrolled in MCC during the spring of 2009 were contacted via email to solicit their participation in the study. A total of 51 former students met the recruitment criteria: 17 in the fall 2007 class, 15 in the spring 2008 class, and 19 in the fall 2008 class. My goal was to secure three to seven interviews. I had originally planned to send three emails, one week apart, to ask for participation. I intended to interview students first come, first served. After my initial email, I received six responses, so no additional email requests were sent. Of the six responses, five interviews were scheduled and conducted. I was not able to schedule the sixth interview due to schedule conflicts. During the third interview, my interviewee, Tex (pseudonym), invited another member of that class, Lacy (pseudonym), to join us. She agreed to participate and signed an informed consent document. In essence, my third interview involved two students. Therefore, there were six participants in the study [see Table 1]. Five of the six participants came from the fall 2008 semester likely because the project was fresh in their minds.

Table 1 Participants' Information

Pseudonym	Class	Gender	Age	EP Topic
Sally	Fall 08	Female	25	Culture of the Mentally Ill
Teddy	Fall 08	Male	19	Social Networking Websites
Tex	Fall 08	Male	42	Culture of Forest Dwellers
Lacy	Fall 08	Female	28	Culture of Strip Clubs
Maggie	Fall 08	Female	21	Culture of Marimbists
Billy	Fall 07	Male	28	Culture of Springfield (The Simpsons)

Interviews

Conversations with participants were guided by a semi-structured open-ended interview protocol (Spradley, 1979) [see Appendix B]. Interviews were scheduled according to mutual availability and every effort was made to reduce students' need to travel. They were conducted at the MCC campus, a coffee shop, and a bar. The meeting place was designated by the student. Light refreshments were provided during the interviews and each student received a $10 gift card as a gesture of thanks. Prior to conducting each interview, participants signed an informed consent document. All conversations were audio-taped with permission and then transcribed.

Data Analysis

Transcription of all interviews took place as soon after the interview as possible. During the transcription process, researcher comments were inserted and indicated by using brackets or italics. Researcher comments consisted of ancillary information designed to give further context to the transcriptions as well as to begin the process of analysis. While critical pedagogy serves as the theoretical foundation for the study, the data analysis was guided by grounded theory and the constant comparative method was used (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Specifically, a constructivist version (Charmaz, 2005, 2006) of grounded theory was used. This version of grounded theory does not ascribe to the positivistic roots of Glaser and Strauss's work. Charmaz (2005) explained that

> what observers see and hear depends upon their prior interpretive frames, biographies, and interests as well as the research context, their relationships with research participants, concrete field experiences, and modes of generating and recording empirical materials. No qualitative research rests on pure induction – the questions we ask of the empirical world frame what we know of it. (p. 509)

When conducting qualitative research, "the researcher is the instrument" (Patton, 2002, p. 14). As such, full disclosure of researcher position, relationship to participants, bias, and theoretical perspective is paramount to fully appreciate such a study's findings and assertions. This is why I included the subjectivities statement above. Constructivist grounded theory asserts that theory is not simply grounded in the data. Rather, the analyst assigns meaning to the data and develops theory from the data based on his or her positionalities, subjectivities, contexts (cultural, historical, social), and life experiences.

While coding did not occur until all interviews were transcribed, data collection and analyses occurred simultaneously vis-à-vis researcher comments and continuous reflection on conversations with students. Charmaz (2005) said that researchers using grounded theory "remain close to their studied worlds" (p. 508). An open coding process was used. The data and my perceptions of it informed the creation of codes. There was no pre-set code list and codes were recorded directly on the margins of printouts of interview transcripts. Codes took the form of acronyms, which were created to account for data chunks pertaining to particular topics of conversation. For example, if a chunk of data was deemed to be about writing the paper, then that section was coded WTP. If a data chunk was about the value of the project, then that section was coded VOP. A key for all codes was created, which consisted of 26 separate codes. After the five

interviews were coded, an initial list of seven themes was created. Those seven themes were then collapsed into two larger, more encompassing themes with multiple sub-themes. Particularly rich and illustrative passages from the interviews were highlighted within the transcripts using two different colors, one for each theme. Finally, each theme was reformulated into a grounded theory.

Findings

Two major themes emerged from the data analysis. They are: rethinking education and building rapport and accountability.

Rethinking Education

Students as pedagogues. By design, the EP and corresponding Open House events encouraged students to consider topics about which they were passionate. No parameters were given to student regarding which topic they could choose, and most students selected topics that were close to them in some way. In many instances, students engage in a version of autoethnography (Ellis, 2004) by opting to study cultures of which they are, or have been, a part. To the students, the EP represented an opportunity to educate others about a part of their own lives or something very important to them. Sally stated:

> I decided that since I work with people that are mentally ill, it would be nice for me to educate other people about people with mental illnesses because they do have that stigma that I was talking about and I felt like it would be easier for [mentally ill] people if, for them to interact with "normal" people if they ["normal" people] knew more about mental illnesses and things.

For Sally, both the in-class presentation and the Open House that followed provided opportunities for her to problematize stereotyping of the mentally ill through her analysis of the cultural elements of those with mental illness. As such, I viewed Sally's project, and other students' projects with similar aims, as an act of critical pedagogy. Through dialogue enabled by the Open House, she attempted to move classmates and Open House attendees toward a critical consciousness about the cultural, social, and emotional depictions and positions of the mentally ill within United States society. She continued:

> The best part I think would be that I actually did get out and I did educate people on what I wanted to educate them about. I answered the questions as best as I could. And, I feel like they [classmates and Open House attendees] are more aware of the things that they say and the way that they treat people now because I spoke up and was like, hey guys, this is what's going on with people with mental illness and how they feel when you use words like retard and crazy and things like that.

For Maggie, exposing others to the marimba was a primary goal. As a former high school marimbist, Maggie viewed the instrument, and those who play it, as undervalued. She commented:

> People don't know what a marimba is, so I was just excited for the chance to explain it to people and show people this amazing instrument that doesn't get as

much recognition as I personally think that it should. So, I thought it was awesome. I really did.

The students also described learning as a result of other students' work. For Teddy, this meant rethinking a stereotype he had about another student's topic. This can be perceived as movement toward critical consciousness. His passage below indicated the educative power of the student as pedagogue:

> One that really stood out to me was [student's name]'s presentation about Tupperware. You know…I've always known there's kind of this you know house-wife kitchen kind or you know standing in the kitchen making dinner kind of what's the word I'm looking for kind of like stereotype of the Tupperware wife. I never really realized…that Tupperware has been is such a cultural phenomenon. There's really a dedicated culture behind Tupperware, you know buyers, users, sellers. And people really love Tupperware, but at the same time it's also…not held to the confines of that stereotype that I'd imagined…you know there are men that have Tupperware parties and…so there's that. I will say that I bought some Tupperware.

The in-class presentation and the Open House provided students with two platforms to educate others, engage in dialogue, and further understand their own work. The in-class presentation was a five minute opportunity to share their work with classmates. And, the Open House was a one-hour freestyle event where essentially anyone could walk through the classroom and interact with students both verbally and non-verbally. Each platform meant different things to the students. Teddy talked about the Open House in particular:

> And so it was interesting 'cause it seems like a lot of speeches I've given in the past years have been in front of my peers, you know, people that don't deviate very much in age or you know in their cultural constructs, so it was very interesting to give a presentation like that in front of a more varied demographic of people…I had older people there [and] younger people that still didn't…exactly fit into that niche of peers that I have formally given presentations to. So that was very interesting and I feel like that also helps kind of give it more you know educate me more toward a real world application of my presentation skills in speaking to varied groups of people and that I think embodies the reality of where we'll take our presentation skills when we leave school.

As the Open House progressed, students interacted with any number of attendees with varying knowledge bases on and attitudes regarding their particular topics. That meant students had to constantly assess how best to present and talk about their projects. During the in-class presentation, presenting students had control over their five minute allotment, and therefore did not have to constantly make internal and perhaps unconscious shifts in their approach. This was by design as well. In my perception, the in-class presentation represented a safe and controlled "run through" for the students to get comfortable with their materials with peers/classmates. However, Tex did not see it that way. He stated:

> I think maybe the five minute run through wasn't as a safe as the actual Open House…when people get up and they stand in front of the class, even though we

had a great rapport in that class, you've got a bunch of people that are all sitting there staring at you with an expectation. And the Open House is more free form, people come by and it's not like you're really under a lot of pressure to tie everything together and make a lot of sense because they can see that and you know…with the one on one conversations, you could more tailor each presentation to what the other person…what they're interested in and what they're curious about.

Surprises. Often times in educational settings, students are unaware of each other's work because tests, papers, and other assignments are usually transferred from student to teacher and vice versa. The EP presented an opportunity for students to become very aware of one another's work through the in-class presentations and the Open House. Students were often surprised at how well their classmates performed. Teddy said:

I thought the most surprising thing was that I…was legitimately surprised and my expectations were certainly surpassed in seeing my you know my peers and fellow classmates' projects…I honestly think that every single one of the other Open House presentations that I…experienced and was there for were, I found them to be very interesting and educative to me.

Sally commented:

I was really surprised…I think [another student in the class] was the one who did her family tree and I was really surprised. I didn't get the impression she was really serious, but I was really surprised at her project, the way it came out and the way she articulated things. I thought it was really cool.

In this passage, Sally explained how the Open House actually allowed her to rethink her assumptions about a fellow classmate. This type of performance project can give students who might be shy or appear to be uninterested during class sessions the chance to shine. Tex remarked on Maggie's project: "That was awesome. It…caught me completely off guard. I wasn't aware that [the student] was bringing in the marimba. I thought it was excellent. I think it added a depth to…the Open House that it wouldn't have had without that." It was empowering and affirming to me to know that students had not only remembered each others' projects, but that they had really been impacted by them. It was evident that the Open House events were memorable to the students in their educational journeys, and lives.

Accessible information. Tex articulated this sub-theme beautifully when he stated:

The fact that it was both a presentation to the class and a presentation to the public…is something completely different than in any of my other classes and I think the public part of the presentation helps to kind of take it out of the ivory tower and make it more real.

To involve not only the campus community, but also the larger community, in the Open House allowed the students to make a real impact on a wide variety of attendees. They had an outlet for their research, ideas, and analysis, and those who attended gained access to information normally inaccessible. Not only did the Open House attendees gain access to the student projects, but fellow classmates did as well. Billy

mentioned, "I mean, I just like learning about cultures that they [classmates]…were researching…it was just an opportunity to get a huge mass of information all at once."

Building Rapport and Accountability

Rapport. Students commented on the rapport and community that had been built within our class as being a positive influence on the success of the EP events. Throughout each semester, I intentionally tried to create situations in class meant to build rapport. The rapport we established helped "students to take risks, experiment, and rely on their own judgments in classroom discussion and activities" (McDaniel, 1994, p. 28). At the start of each class, we shared food and stories. Story telling was used because it "can begin the process of building community" (hooks, 2010, p. 49). As the semester progressed, in-class dialogue included topics that are both sensitive and controversial. The course content (e.g., social class, religion) required discussion about such topics. I had to assure the students that no topic was taboo as anthropologists study all aspects of human culture. As for the EPs, no topic was out of bounds. Sally explained:

> I think that [rapport building activities] helped us establish you know…this little community. And we did trust each other…enough to do projects about strippers and without hurting someone's feelings or maybe someone in the class had a mental illness, I don't know. But we learned to present it in such a way that would, could be confrontational, but that wouldn't necessary lead to like this huge blowup. And I really enjoyed the stories…I thought they were really cool. And the open conversation, I like that more than like the formal setting. To me, I don't get that trust from a teacher, I don't feel like I can approach that teacher as opposed to someone who wants to talk and tells stories and things like that and opens themselves up a little more. I'm more apt to trust them better and go to them and trust them more than someone that wouldn't.

Billy added, "I know I was pretty comfortable with everybody in the class and I mean I think all those exercises definitely helped. I mean I don't know how it did for anybody else. But I'd say I felt pretty comfortable with everybody in the classroom."

Accountability. By making elements of the EP project public instead of strictly private, students were held more accountable for their work due to the larger audience [see Figure 1]. Sally said:

> The one thing that I take pride in are my presentations and my papers because I feel like people get to know a little bit about me through those things. And so I wanted to do my best because I want them [classmates and Open House attendees] to know that I'm this really cool person and I'm gonna do my best for things I actually care about.

The Open House events represented an unknown audience to the students, which meant they had to prepare differently for it versus the in-class presentation. Tex stated,

> Throughout the course of the class, like we talked about, we [class members] were basically enculturating each other to ourselves so that by the time my presentation came around, I knew how to present my material to these people [class members]. This [Open House] was a an unknown variable, the folks

coming in out of the hallway, so I had to be sure and really be able to communicate it, not just communicate it in a way that we [class members] had already previously agreed to communicate.
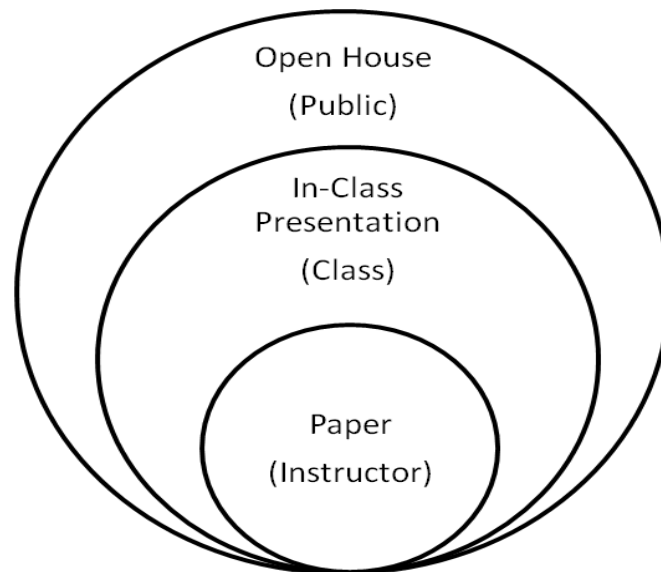

Figure 1. EP elements and audience.

Each circle represents one element of the EP. The text inside the parentheses is the person or persons viewing the students' work. As the circles get larger, so does the number of potential persons viewing the work as well as the level of accountability felt by the students. This figure also represents the sequence of the elements. The paper is due first, followed by the in-class presentation, and finally, the Open House.

Discussion

Performance assessment has untapped potential to positively impact students enrolled in postsecondary education, and the community college in particular. Students involved in this study reported overwhelmingly positive sentiments about the EP and the Open House specifically. While further work is necessary to determine the efficacy of performance assessment in various contexts, two substantive grounded theories were generated from this study. Even though these two theories may not be applicable to all uses of performance assessment, they may provide teacher/researchers with valuable information to consider.

Two Grounded Theories

Students as pedagogues. Based on the findings above, two grounded theories have been generated. First, the performance assessment elements of the EP, the in-class presentation and the Open House, positioned students as pedagogues. As such, students were very intentional and careful regarding topic selection, choosing topics they were passionate about. Students reveled in knowing they would have the opportunity to educate others about their passion/topics. As students began to see themselves as pedagogues, and specifically as critical pedagogues, they became both more serious and excited about their EPs. The scope of their educative range was fairly

wide, at least potentially, and unknown. Learners were their instructor (me), classmates, and the larger campus and local community. The first grounded theory to come out of this work is as follows: when students are positioned as pedagogues through performance assessment, their investment, passion, and care for the project increases, and therefore, their learning increases as well.

If students do not put enough time, effort, and care into their projects, often, some level of remorse is felt. This was evident in Lacy's comments. She stated, "Personally, I wish I would have invested more. I think it [her lack of investment] was because I wasn't as comfortable with my topic." Her sentiments reiterate the importance of topic selection. Here it is important to note that the public nature of the project may influence students' topic selection. In Lacy's case, her topic, the culture of strip clubs, was troublesome because she felt embarrassed during the Open House. Because of this, she was not completely invested. Lastly, the notion that students felt they actually influenced the learning of others was empowering. Tex stated:

Not only were my classmates throughout the semester open to all of these different cultures and ideas, but random people that we drew in out of the hallways were open to these different cultures and different ideas and…that's a wonderful thing.

As I reflect upon this grounded theory and the notion of students as pedagogues, I consider the ways in which these students have served as pedagogues for me as I conducted this study as a form of professional development. In essence, the students I interviewed provided me with rich information to inform my future practice and implementation of the EP. Based on the interview data, I will certainly take time to revise and retool future courses, and specifically the EP, with the goal of maximizing student learning. The descriptive feedback provided by students has far-ranging implications that other instructors may find helpful as well, which is a major goal of faculty inquiry and the SoTL.

Accountability through audience diversity and experience authenticity. Two affective elements fed the success of the performance components of the EP: rapport and accountability. It was necessary for me, as the facilitator of the class, to intentionally attempt to build rapport with and amongst the class. The greater the rapport within the class, the more accountability felt by class members to do their best work on the EPs. Moreover, the evolution of the EP from a private to a public display led to an incremental increase in accountability felt by students. The more people viewing their work, the more accountability they felt. However important these two affective components of the project may be, they were embedded in the project from the start. The interviews generated two additional components of the Open House that were critical to student accountability and learning: the diversity of the attendees/audience and the authenticity of the dialogue with the attendees/audience. This was evident in Teddy's comments cited above when he talked about the "more varied demographic of people [at the Open House]" and the "real world application of my presentation skills [at the Open House]." It was also evident in Tex's comment cited above: "I think the public part of the presentation helps to kind of take it out of the ivory tower and make it more real." Grounded theory two can be stated as follows: performance assessments which offer a diverse audience within an authentic dialogical environment compel students to

feel accountable for their work, to put forth their best effort, and to perform optimally, thereby maximizing learning outcomes.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

A more expansive approach to exploring the research question guiding this study could have produced more complete findings. While ideal for the qualitative paradigm, the small number of participants does not give a holistic picture of all student perceptions of the EP experience. Despite this, the small number of participants allowed for a deep exploration and appreciation of students' experiences. The findings, along with the grounded theories, are not meant to be generalized. However, they may help to inform practice as they are transferrable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Over time, the efficacy of these grounded theories can be explored with other students and teachers within other learning contexts. The interviews with participants relied on self-reporting and memory, but reflected the students' perceptions of their time in class during the time of each interview. Further research on this topic might explore additional and more diverse sources of data such as an on-line survey, focus groups, analysis of student writing, and formal course evaluations. Additionally, future research might explore the perceptions of Open House attendees to understand their experiences with the event and the learning that takes place as a result of their attendance.

Conclusion

Completing this work has been powerful and uplifting to me on a number of levels. I am passionate about the teaching work that I currently do at the community college. In one of my researcher comments following an interview, I wrote, "I'm finding that I miss my old students." Carrying out this research was a way to reconnect with them, to see how they are doing, and to express to them that I still care about their educational journeys even though they are no longer in my class. This work will add to current SoTL literature generally and within the community college literature specifically. Work in these areas is critical to student learning. Performance assessment at the community college level can be powerful and life-changing. Tex stated: "I think the class in general and the Open House definitely being a part of it may have changed the direction of my life in some ways, you know? I'm seriously considering anthropology as a career choice." Performance assessment can be used at the postsecondary level in a wide variety of contexts and can result in profound demonstrations of student learning. It can provide educators with "an opportunity to secure information about learning that can help improve the quality of both curriculum and teaching" (Eisner, 1999, p. 660). As evidenced by this study, performance assessment can be a very enjoyable, yet initially intimidating and arduous, process for students. Continued work in this area by teacher/researchers is imperative.

References

Alverno College. (2009). *Academics*. Retrieved from
    http://www.alverno.edu/academics/index.html

Baker, E. L. (1997). Model-based performance assessment. *Theory into Practice, 36*,
    247-254.

Boyer, E. L. (1990). Scholarship reconsidered: Priorities of the professoriate. San
    Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Brookfield, S. D. (2006). The skillful teacher: On technique, trust, and responsiveness in
    the classroom (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Bueschel, A. C. (2008). *Listening to students about learning.* Stanford, CA: The
    Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. Retrieved from
    http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/dynamic/publications/elibrary_pdf_737.pdf

Charmaz, K. (2005). Grounded theory in the 21st century: Applications for advancing
    social justice studies. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook of
    Qualitative Research* (3rd ed.) (pp. 507-535). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Charmaz, K. (2006). Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative
    analysis. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Clemson University. (2009). *Creative inquiry*. Retrieved from
    http://www.clemson.edu/ugs/creative_inquiry/

Darling-Hammond, L. (1994). Performance-based assessment and educational equity.
    Harvard Educational Review, 64, 5-30.

Darling-Hammond, L., & Snyder, J. (2000). Authentic assessment of teaching in
    context. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 16*, 523-545.

Ellis, C. (2004). The ethnographic I: A methodological novel about autoethnography.
    Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira.

Eisner, E. W. (1999). The uses and limits of performance assessment. *Phi Delta
    Kappan, 80*, 658-660.

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum.

Glasser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory*. Chicago:
    Aldine.

hooks, b. (1994). Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom. New
    York: Routledge.

hooks, b. (2003). *Teaching community: A pedagogy of hope*. New York: Routledge.

hooks, b. (2010). *Teaching critical thinking: Practical wisdom*. New York: Routledge.

Huber, M. T. (2008). *The promise of faculty inquiry for teaching and learning basic skills*.
    Stanford, CA: The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. Retrieved
    from http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/dynamic/publications/elibrary_pdf_738.pdf

Johnson, B. (1996). *The performance assessment handbook: Performances and
    exhibitions* (Vol. 2). Princeton, NJ: Eye on Education.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

McDaniel, T. R. (1994). College classrooms of the future: Megatrends to paradigm
    shifts. *College Teaching, 42*, 27-31.

McKinney, K. (2007). Enhancing learning through the scholarship of teaching and
    learning. Bolton, MA: Anker.

Montgomery, K. (2002). Authentic tasks and rubrics: Going beyond traditional
    assessments in college teaching. *College Teaching, 50*, 34-39.

Pecheone, R. L., Pigg, M. J., Chung, R. R., & Souviney, R. J. (2005). Performance assessment and electronic portfolios: Their effect on teacher learning and education. *The Clearing House, 78*, 164-176.

Rodgers, C. R. (2006). Attending to student voice: The impact of descriptive feedback on learning and teaching. *Curriculum Inquiry, 36*, 209-237.

Schön, D. A. (1987). Educating the reflective practitioner: Toward a new design for teaching and learning in the professions. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Shepherd, C. M., & Mullane, A. M. (2008). Rubrics: The key to fairness in performance based assessments. *Journal of College Teaching & Learning, 5*(9), 27-32.

Spradley, J. P. (1979). *The ethnographic interview*. London: Holt, Reinhart & Winston.

Stiggins, R. J., & Bridgeford, N. J. (1985). Performance assessment for teacher development. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 7*, 85-97.

Taylor, K., Marienau, C., & Fiddler, M. (2000). *Developing adult learners: Strategies for teachers and trainers*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. (2009). Program areas. Retrieved from http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/programs/index.asp?key=21

Tomlinson, C. A. (1999). *The differentiated classroom: Responding to the needs of all learners*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Appendix A
ANT 123, Exploration Project Rubric (Presentation/Open House)

1. During the classmate presentation, did the student provide a clear and concise overview of their work? Was the presentation at or under 5 minutes?

_____**(10 Points)**
Comments:

2. During the classmate presentation and the Open House, did the student make use of creative media? This may include a poster, photo collage, artifacts, etc. (not a comprehensive list).

_____**(5 Points)**
Comments:

3. Did the student appear to be confident, prepared, and knowledgeable during the entire event? Was the student able to answer classmate questions? Was the student able to carry out conversations with Open House attendees?

_____**(5 Points)**
Comments:

_____**TOTAL (20 Points)**

Appendix B

Semi-Structured Open-Ended Interview Protocol (Spradley, 1979)

1) Acquisition of demographic information.

   Sex

   Age

   Major

   Degree progress

   Career plans

2) Thinking back to our class together, what were your initial reactions to the Open House events that were scheduled for the end of the semester?
3) Talk about the process you went through to decide on your topic to explore.
4) Talk about the process of going from topic idea to writing your paper.
5) How did you prepare for the in class presentation and the Open House? Were you nervous?
6) How did you decide on what information to extract from the paper and include in the presentations?
7) Describe how you prepared for the in class presentations and the Open House.
8) Was the in class presentation helpful in preparing for the Open House? Why/why not?
9) Describe your interactions with Open House attendees.
10) What was the best part about the Open House?
11) What would you change about the Open House events?
12) What surprised you most about the Open House events?
13) What did you learn from the Open House events?
14) Did the project allow you to better understand and explore the course content? Why/why not?
15) In what ways did you preparation for the Open House differ from traditional in class presentations?
16) Were you compelled to do your best work because the Open House was a public event? Why/why not?
17) Did you invite anyone to attend the Open House? Why/why not?
18) Do you think other students enjoyed the Open House? Why/why not?
19) Do you think the Open House attendees enjoyed the event? Why/why not?
20) Should the Open House events continue to be a part of ANT 123? Why/why not?
21) Is there anything else you think I ought to know about this topic?