Assessment at TGS

Rationale

In line with our project- and place-based learning methodology, we believe that student assessment needs to be authentic, relevant, individualized, and focused on growth. Guided by TGS Learning Targets, our assessment philosophy is based on two principles: excellence and mastery which is guided by the levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy. Students’ learning is assessed at two different levels: task specific (formative assessment, summative assessment), and mastery of learning targets selected for the module.

The principle of excellence is rooted in the philosophy of “ethics of excellence”: each student is expected to do his/her best, most excellent, work, and nothing less than that is acceptable. Through the continuous feedback process, students are encouraged to challenge themselves, strive for excellence, and eventually achieve it and celebrate it.

Similarly, the principle of mastery, encourages students to become masters in a particular area, project, topic, etc. This principle allows them to identify which of the learning targets they want to focus on more in depth and become masters at. At this level, however, the expectations are that students are not only submitting excellent work, but that they are creating original pieces of work or passing their knowledge onto someone else.

Defining Excellence

The principle of excellence is closely related to our task assessment. At the beginning of each module, whether teacher or student designed, students develop a definition of excellence for that module (task, summative assessment). Educators facilitate the development of this definition, but students have voice, choice, and autonomy in creating it. Once this definition has been established, students rework it into a task-specific rubric, which then is used for grading (on an A - F scale).
This task-specific rubric is used as a guiding tool in the formative assessment process, but as the final assessment tool in the summative process.

**Formative Assessment**

In preparation for their final tasks, students are guided through a carefully structured set of formative assessments (checkpoints, snapshots) that help them develop skills and knowledge needed for each module and each final task.

Formative assessment helps both students and educators identify progress and track improvement, but is not necessarily used for grading. This is a checkpoint, used for feedback, reworking, adjusting, and evaluating progress.

Examples may include reflections, observations, rubrics, self-assessment, peer-assessment, first drafts of work, models, discussions, or other class work.

**Summative Assessment**

Each module ends in a summative task that exemplifies students’ learning for that particular module. These are project- and place-based tasks that allow students to connect their learning to specific, real world, examples and experiences.

Student designed rubric, based on the principle of excellence discussed above, is used to assess the summative tasks.

Examples may include: webstore design, debates, presentations, creative projects, writing samples, etc.

**Grading**

Each summative task will receive a grade that will be reflected on students’ transcripts. Formative assessments, however, will be used to prepare students for their summative task and help them refine those.

At TGS, students have the privilege of assessing themselves, with teacher feedback and review of the assigned grade. Once students create the task-specific rubric, they follow the criteria and descriptors of excellence to grade themselves. In addition to that, they write a rationale for the assigned grade.
Teachers and advisors meet with students to discuss their rubrics and performance and either approve the grade or request reworking or regrading of the summative task.

**Defining Mastery**

In preparation for every module, whether teacher- or student-led, specific learning targets are selected to be achieved by the end of the module. Each of these learning targets is carefully connected to the summative assessment tasks, and, consequently, to each formative assessment. In addition to excellence-based task rubrics, students are assessed on the learning targets levels of mastery.

It is our goal to help our students become masters in a particular field of their choosing as they go through their TGS experience. As such, we define mastery as ability to create or innovate an original piece of work that contributes to the existing field of expertise, or ability to pass on the acquired skills, knowledge, expertise to a selected audience.

We see the ability to create, innovate, or teach as the highest level of Bloom’s Taxonomy, and thus aspire for our students to reach that level.

As such, we have divided the levels of mastery into three performance categories: master, specialist, novice, and have designed an assessment rubric, structured around the levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy, to measure students’ achievement levels.

**Master**

To become masters, students need to show the highest level of competence in the selected learning targets for the specific module by creating a new or original piece of work and/or by teaching their peers/community the learned skills/acquired knowledge.

Teach - Pass on new skills or knowledge to someone else: generate, plan, produce

Create - Produce new or original work that contributes a new piece to the existing body of knowledge (contained within the learning target): design, assemble, construct, conjecture, develop, formulate, author, investigate
Specialist

To become specialists, students need to show a high level of competence in the selected learning targets for the specific module by being able to evaluate, analyze, and apply the learned skill/acquired knowledge.

Apply - Use information in new situations: execute, implement, solve, use, demonstrate, interpret, operate, schedule, sketch

Analyze - Draw connections among ideas: differentiate, organize, relate, compare, contrast, distinguish, examine, experiment, question, test

Evaluate - Justify a stand or decision: appraise, argue, defend, judge, select, support, critique, weight, value

Novice

To become novices, students need to show a basic level of competence in the selected learning targets for the specific module by being able to understand and remember the learned skills/acquired knowledge.

Understand - Explain ideas or concepts: classify, describe, discuss, explain, identify, locate, recognize, report, select, translate

Remember - Recall facts and basic concepts: define, duplicate, list, memorize, repeat, state.

**Rubric:**

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<th>Level</th>
<th>Descriptor</th>
<th>Action Verbs</th>
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<td><strong>Master</strong></td>
<td>Students consistently and comprehensively apply knowledge and skills (related to the LT) to create or invent independently, an original piece of work, or teach the material to a selected audience. Students go beyond general analysis, application, and evaluation to demonstrate a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the module's subject matter, learning targets selected, and skills expected. Students propose sophisticated and complex solutions to a problem related to the selected learning target.</td>
<td>generate, plan, produce, design, assemble, construct, conjecture, develop, formulate, author, investigate</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Specialist</strong></td>
<td>Students consistently apply knowledge and skills (related to the LT) in new situations; they draw connections amongst ideas, and offer clear and well-crafted justification of their decision/stand...opinion/work. Students demonstrate a solid understanding of the module's subject matter, learning targets selected, and skills expected; they are able to evaluate, analyze, and apply them. Students propose clear and well-thought out and crafted solutions to a problem related to the selected learning target.</td>
<td>execute, implement, solve, use, demonstrate, interpret, operate, schedule, sketch, differentiate, organize, relate, compare, contrast, distinguish, examine, experiment, question, test, appraise, argue, defend, judge, select, support, critique, weight, value</td>
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<td><strong>Novice</strong></td>
<td>Students sufficiently recall facts to explain ideas or concepts related to the selected learning targets. Students show clear understanding and demonstrate progression in subject matter, learning targets selected, and skills expected. Students propose basic solutions that need further development to a problem related to the selected learning target.</td>
<td>classify, describe, discuss, explain, identify, locate, recognize, report, select, translate, define, duplicate, list, memorize, repeat, state.</td>
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