

Fiji National University – BEd (TVET)

EDU350 Educational Psychology – Term 1 (2010)

Marking Guide

I know that 'exam technique' is not something that is, or should be taught explicitly but this is unrealistic. Of course, in an ideal world no 'exam technique' would be required because the assessments would be fair, unbiased, and have incredible construct validity. Until this kind of assessment can be devised there still has to be an acknowledgement of some exam technique. Here is the minimum that I would suggest. Look at how the exam marking guide is made and then put your emphasis on this.

Question 1: State a psychological theory that has surprised you from this unit in educational psychology:

- State a psychological theory (or theories) that has interested you (25% of this question) ...
- ... perhaps it surprised you, or you felt negatively (repulsed) towards the theory(ies) (25%).
- Explain your reasons why it is interesting to you, and explain how you will incorporate this information in your future teaching (50%).

This question SHOULD be self explanatory. It was designed by the students themselves. The important points to make are that the student can:

- adequately state a theory, ie not just name it but also explain briefly what the theory is about. So for instance they cannot just say 'I like operant conditioning' they've got to be able to state what the key factors are in operant conditioning.
- Explaining what surprised the student would 'normally' be something that would require some reflection. It's not the easiest thing in the world to consider BUT these students had time to reflect on this before the exam. In fact they had 5 weeks to reflect as they knew this question was coming up. Honestly this part (worth 25%) is simply a case of explaining what part of the theory was surprising.
- It's only the last part of the question that explains WHY it was interesting. Most students seemed to interpret this as in thinking that the interest had to be 'positive' but they could have focussed on a negative. Such as: "... *'operant conditioning' is of interest and surprised me because it seems that humans can be simply 'programmed' with the right stimulus and reinforcement schedule*". Surely we have more free will than this?"

I found most students in Term 1 were extra-ordinarily poor at this question given that they had so much time to prepare for it. I mean if worst came to worst, they could have even written out the whole question before hand and simply brought it in and copied it out on the exam paper (since they it was an open book exam).

Every student in Term 1 mentioned learning theories alone despite the fact that the course covered so many more psychological constructs in educational contexts. I had to work hard to 'find' other aspects of psychology other than learning theory. They could have mentioned: ICT

in education; special needs educational theory and practice; assessment practices; pedagogical design; and theories of intelligence.

Question 2: Read the following case study on a teaching/learning context. Identify at least three psychological theories that are being used implicitly or explicitly (30% of this question) in this teaching/learning context. Evaluate if any of these would be an effective teaching/learning strategy and suggest (if any) improvements that might be made to make it more effective (70%).

Most students of this worked on explaining the theories which is worth the 30% – and then left the evaluation as a sort of 1 paragraph (after thought?) text – which is of course worth much more (70%). I mean if one was going to ‘skip out’ on explanation, I’d do a 1 or 2 sentence summary of an identified theory (identify and then explain how you made that assessment), and then spend paragraphs explaining if they are good teaching strategies and if they can be improved upon. Most students seemed to zero in on learning theories alone and didn’t consider the other theories we considered in the course.

Teaching History on the Island of How’R’U

On the (fictitious) north Pacific island of How’R’U, Jone, the newly appointed history teacher, was keen to engage his pupils in his topic of history. Jone himself was originally from Lautoka in Fiji and had recently graduated from his studies to become a qualified secondary school teacher in history and physical education. Jone had been recruited from the Ministry of Education in How’R’U through international advertisements in which it was made clear that the Ministry wanted to employ teachers with innovative teaching methodologies. Jone aimed to not disappoint.

Accordingly he set out a year’s curriculum for his Year 9 (Form 3) students as follows:

A theme was set out on the topic of the impact that the events of World War II (WWII) had on the subsequent societal development and political structure of the Pacific Island nations up to this day. Over the course of three terms, his pupils would learn about key events in WWII, events that immediately occurred after WWII within the nations of the Pacific (including Australia and New Zealand) and then explain how this made an impact (or not) on the subsequent history of key nations, focussing particularly on Samoa, Fiji, Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands.

This is an ambitious project but not impossible given that he has all year to try and achieve his aims.

Term 1:

1. Children would be given photocopies of the key dates within WWII. These dates would be memorised. Part of this would be facilitated in class through the use of drills. Jone would say something like “The Battle of Midway, in June of 1942, was instrumental in defeating the ...?” and then the class would reply together ‘... Japanese navy’. Children were encouraged to participate with the threat of detention if they did not participate enthusiastically and/or gave an incorrect answer three times in a drill session.

This is so obviously a behaviouristic learning paradigm, leaning heavily towards operant conditioning. Negative reinforcement is being used. Improvements should establish a reinforcement schedule that (at the very least) favours positive reinforcement as this has been shown as more effective in shaping behaviour.

2. Children would be tested on the dates half way through the term with a multiple choice test. The highest scores for the top four pupils would select who was going to representing the school on the local television programme called 'Blockbuster IQ Challenge'. This popular television show asks questions about general knowledge and also a special section on a team's choice of specialised knowledge - in this case the social and political history of the Pacific during and after the events of WWII. The television programme was to be recorded during the holidays between term 1 & 2. Extra after school tuition for these four pupils would be given in the last three weeks of term 2.

The multiple choice format again suggests a rote learning paradigm. There is evidence that Jone is heavily learning towards a Spearman model of intelligence that suggests a central intelligence factor ('g'), because doing well on a multiple choice test in a history lesson is supposed to be the selection criteria for children in a general knowledge quiz that looks outside of their speciality topic to a large degree. The learning paradigm furthermore does not help the children who did not get selected for the television show, so Jone appears to be focussing on face validity of his learning and teaching tasks with little evidence of construct validity of what he originally sets himself out to do. It is not that the 'reward' of appearing on the TV show representing the school is not a good idea, however not for the educational aims and goals of this history course. Jone should reconsider his efforts to focus on construct validity of the tasks, rather than face validity. In other words does this task genuinely help the children understand the social and economic consequences of WWII.

3. Children were encouraged to use the latest ICT tools such as 'Google' and 'Wikipedia' on the internet to find out more about WWII as part of their homework activities, which asked them to construct a set of 8 maps of the Pacific theatre of operations showing the movement of the various troops over the course of WWII.

The use of ICT (internet) is being used as a source of knowledge, that is the equivalent of an encyclopaedia but it is electronic and online. Thus Jone is using the teaching technology to support an *acquisition* metaphor of learning. This task does at least acknowledge a different 'intelligence' in that the task is focussed on 'spatial intelligence' in constructing maps. Jone may unwittingly be using aspects of *Multiple Intelligence Theory*. Improvements if you were to use the online encyclopaedia knowledge would be to focus on more interaction in an online environment. For instance the children could set up a wiki to jointly make the 8 maps. This would allow them to assess each other and improve on it.

Term 2:

4. Children watched a number of documentaries and films about WWII. Particularly the films produced by Steven Spielberg 'Saving Private Ryan' and 'Band of Brothers', that takes place around the events of the conflict in Europe of WWII. Discussion of the films took place after the screenings over the course of three weeks.

The learning paradigm here is probably more constructivist (cognitive learning theory) because the films and documentaries about WWII are discussed. It is hard to know how this could be

improved without knowing how the discussions were built to allow the children to build the facts and figures they learned in term 1 into the scaffolding that they might be mentally building for themselves. Perhaps this learning exercise should have occurred in Term 1 to make more of it.

5. Three pensioners from the old people's home had been veterans from the Vietnam war as volunteers with the Australian military, were invited to give a talk to the class about what it was like to be in the conflict in Vietnam in the 1960s and early 1970s. The pensioners would talk about their time during the conflict. One was a logistics officer, another was a gunnery sergeant and a final one was an air cargo transport navigator.

This is another example of something that has high face validity, but perhaps little construct validity. Specifically Jone is assuming that the war stories of veterans are all universally the same. None of the veterans actually took part in WWII. It is true to say though that the veterans from the later conflict would have been influenced by WWII. This may be true but it's not clear from the description whether this is assumed, or taken into account. An improvement, if it was not actually done, would be to make it clear to the children that one should NOT assume that the veterans of Vietnam would be the same as the veterans of WWII. The one skill that the children would have to have in this learning context would be inter-personal skills to try and empathise with the war veterans.

6. Finally a dramatised re-enactment of attack on Pearl Harbour was to be created and presented to the school and parents at the end of term review. The re-enactment would take 40 minutes to present. Jone had managed to sweet talk a carpenter into making props of military naval ships, and Japanese bombers. The dramatisation was written by Jone himself and checked by an academic (accounting) friend of his back in Fiji to be factually accurate. Much of the term was spent having all the children learn their lines as part of this re-enactment, which included two children who had special needs, one who was deaf (but could lip read), and the other who was partially sighted.

This might be a fantastic learning exercise. There are some warning signals that this might have been a good idea that was poorly executed. Firstly, the historical accuracy probably isn't best checked by an lecturer in accounting (unless the latter happens to be a WWII history buff). Secondly the last sentence suggests that the performance was simply rote learned and that the re-enactment was done more to impress the parents at the end of term, rather than to give the children a learning experience. Finally, there appears to have been an attempt at *mainstreaming* in terms of including children who had special physical needs (deaf and partial blindness), but including them in a potentially pedagogically unsound activity doesn't make the 'mainstreaming' activity successful.

It may be that Jone is doing the following things but it isn't explained in the write up. However, assuming that he isn't the following suggestions could be made.

- Firstly make an account of WWII as a re-enactment that is specifically written to explain actions that have or had consequences for the development of the Pacific after the conflict ended.
- Have this account checked by an acknowledged historian of the era.

- Focus on the children re-enacting the events specifically so that they can empathise with the decisions that were being made at the time. In other words it is not enough to simply rote learn lines that have no meaning other than getting them right (in front of an audience).
- Instead of just learning the lines, there should be active class discussion as to how the lines are portrayed – perhaps the children could have some artistic input into the lines – as long as they understand what the re-enactment is trying to achieve (cognitive, & social-cognitive learning theory; or constructionism).
- This would be honing in on the children’s inter-personal and intra-personal intelligence to help them ‘construct’ a more humanistic understanding of the events of WWII and it’s consequences. One could argue that this is also a direct attempt to help children build their emotional intelligence by looking at empathy.

Term 3:

7. Jone managed to secure access to the side of the gym wall to enable his class, and four other participating history classes at the school, to paint a mural depicting the events of WWII in the Pacific Theatre of Operations. The senior history class (Year 12, or Form 6) were the producers of this mural. They organised each of the other five classes (Year 7-11) into the wall allocation, and the themes they were to paint. Mock ups and trials on a small scale were submitted to this class committee prior to approval of the painting on the actual wall.

Again there is potential for this to be a great learning exercise that focusses on inter-personal skills (organising the other classes), visual intelligence to map out the mural properly (multiple intelligence theory), as well as logical intelligence (planning and mapping out the mural before it is actually attempted to be painted). What is not clear however, is if this is what the educational aims of this mural painting would be. Nor is it clear how the children would be monitored and assessed. In particular it is not very clear how the mural of WWII will actually help to cement their understanding of the events of WWII. So children might be instead asked to have a committee which actively discusses what should be included in the mural and this is submitted as a proposal with mock-ups. This might be formally assessed. The actual painting of the mural is therefore just following through what has already been assessed.

8. A debate was organised between the class, with one team arguing for the motion:

“This House believes that overall the effects to the Pacific, after the end of World War II, were beneficial”.

As great as this is (inter-personal intelligence, language intelligence, emotional intelligence) it maybe argued that it might not address substantive issues about WWII events and their consequences. To improve this exercise then the debate might have to be organised with perhaps sub-motions that might be passed too which address substantive curriculum goals. Such as the ‘effects’ might be broken down into economic, social and environmental. They might be quite detailed. It’s not clear too how this might be assessed but some criteria (criterion assessment) might be detailed such as ‘must not say a historical untruth’ (to prevent the debaters just ‘making things up’).

9. The children would take a final exam on the history course (2 hours), which consisted of (i) 10 multiple choice questions, (ii) 5 definitions and (iii) 3 short essay answers (out of a choice of 8 questions) related to WWII and the Pacific Theatre of Operations. The examination was ‘closed book’ meaning that they had to have memorised the key events and incorporated their learning from the whole year. The

grading would be normative, that is the class scores ordered from highest to lowest and then the scores adjusted so that the correct percentage of children would fit into the appropriate school wide grading scheme (A, B, C, D & Fail).

The exam is at the very least for their multiple choice and short answer definitions sections, based on memorised facts suggesting an 'acquisition' model of learning. The fact that the exam is something for the children to read, and then they write their answers, shows an emphasis too on 'language intelligence' (multiple intelligence theory). The assessment is 'norm-referenced' which suggests that the actual construct the exam is trying to assess is which of the examined children can best remember a set of memorised facts. A set of memorised 'facts & figures' is no guarantee that they interrelate and that an overall understanding of how the impact on the Pacific would be understood.

Whether this is desirable or not is not in debate, however, this assessment does NOT assess whether the children understand the impact that the events of WWII had on the subsequent development of the Pacific Islands. In other words, the assessment only tells us how well the children did 'relative' to each other, they do not tell us if they actually 'know' the consequences of WWII to the Pacific region.

To improve on this the very least that the exam should do is to consider making the assessment 'criterion referenced' with specific reference to the overall curriculum goals that Jones was set. Other improvements would be to consider the assessment from an 'understanding' point of view rather than a 'facts&figures' point of view. The former suggests cognitive scaffolding that is being taught and assessed; the latter simply 'stimulus-response' learning.