Learning Kit Assignments – still relevant after thirty years!

The entire idea of a Learning Kit is based on the notion of teaching as learning, the idea that the opportunity to teach others may be a preferred way of facilitating one’s own learning.

Knowles stressed that the following factors are paramount: (1) the adult self-concept requires people be regarded as being capable of self-direction; (2) the adult has a fund of life experience which can contribute to the learning enterprise; (3) the adult is susceptible to new learning at certain “teachable moments”; and (4) the adult has a problem-centered orientation to learning which places a value on learning enterprises having immediate utility. Learning kits fulfill all four of Knowles’ factors related to effective adult learning.

What is a "Learning Kit"? In simple terms the students are required to research and choose a sub topic related to the focus of the course in which they are enrolled and then to prepare a learning program which would help others to learn the knowledge, skills or values which they themselves have acquired about their chosen topic. They assemble the kit, they can present to a class (or not) depending on time available, but the kits have the most “stake” if they are held on file for use by future generations of students. I still teach part of my Literature classes using some materials designed by previous students – and I am careful to credit them. Making the assignment “real” is an important aspect of the kit project, and having kits around the office ensures that some of the students’ work “lives on” in the Faculty.

This kit, which includes (1) instructional outcomes, (2) all necessary resource materials, (3) a note on “learning design” and (4) some kind of self-evaluation for the kit’s user – is the basis upon which a grade is assigned. I usually try and get a librarian into the picture to help students develop their research skills.

Warning: the instructor very quickly falls into the role of facilitator – your expertise in teaching theory, “how to write effective outcomes” and “where to find something on...” will be quickly tested by the students as they experiment with some pretty wild instructional designs! Kits frequently include board games, posters and I once had one that came with a sword. Others came in clever packages: a coffin surrounded Stephen King’s The Dead Zone; a papier-mâché guitar contained the kit for Sherman Alexie’s Reservation Blues; and an ammunition box (complete with Vietnam-era graffiti) contained Tim O’Brien’s, What they Carried!

The downside is the marking involved: one must develop a clear set of guidelines that are loose enough to allow for the students’ imagination to have play, but tight enough that they give the instructor a clear list of required content and the potential to design an effective evaluation system - I use a simple rubric.

Resources:


I have included the draft notes for my marking rubric to give you some idea of the ideas that I have used to evaluate – the real work in adopting student-created materials is in developing a good rubric that works for your students at your course level.

1. Outcomes stated clearly and effectively  
   • attractive to student?  
   • on target for audience?  
   • good mix of literal (list) and judgmental (evaluative) levels of thought?  
   • reasonable, given scope of kit? (4 hours of student work)  
   20 POINTS

2. Design of Learning Program  
   • inclusion of a clear, helpful guide  
   • logical and clear?  
   • allows for expansion / initiative of better student?  
   • “do-able”?  
   20 POINTS

3. Resources  
   • mix of book/online/peer-evaluated? (*see note in text)  
   • current?  
   • interesting?  
   • visually appealing?  
   20 POINTS

4. Creativity and Originality  
   • fun?  
   • student centered?  
   20 POINTS

5. Kit User’s Evaluative Component  
   • adequate?  
   • based on kit’s stated outcomes?  
   • further learning encouraged?  
   10 POINTS

6. Selected References  
   • annotated?  
   • on form?  
   • further reading encouraged?  
   10 POINTS

TOTAL 100 POINTS

This marking criterion is quite exhaustive. Your kit design may require a “different” evaluation. A YouTube, for example, might have less clear evaluative components but stronger creativity/visual appeal. If you feel you need your marking criteria changed, see me.