

EVALUATING ATTITUDES: TOOLS FOR MORE OBJECTIVE ASSESSMENT

Interview by Isabelle DELISLE, Member of *Pédagogie Collégiale's* Editorial Committee¹



France CÔTÉ taught Physiotherapy Technology at CÉGEP Marie-Victorin before becoming a pedagogical counsellor at the same college. Having dedicated much of the past decade to examining and developing tools for learning assessment, she has become a sought-out expert on the subject within the college network. In addition to sharing her expertise through offering workshops and lectures, France has published two books: *Construire des grilles d'évaluation descriptives au collégial* (2014) and *Le dossier d'étude, pour évaluer autrement... Un portfolio d'apprentissage* (2009).

CONTEXT

Ministerial devis, exit profiles, course frameworks, course outlines, and other pedagogical documents stipulate the attitudes college students must demonstrate upon the completion of their program. Medical Electrophysiology students, for example, are expected to treat patients with respect; those in the Pure and Applied Sciences must value intellectual rigour; Art, Literature, and Communication students must demonstrate open-mindedness; those in Building Systems Engineering Technology have to be resourceful, etc. However, does demonstrating rigour, respect, open-mindedness, or resourcefulness mean the same thing to faculty and students? How can we assess these attitudes without being arbitrary?

Assessing fairly and accurately is challenging, and using our professional judgement in assessing student performance is a weighty responsibility. How do we carry out this task? How can we assess students more objectively?

PÉDAGOGIE COLLÉGIALE:

France, for many of us, you are the “go-to” person when we need to ask, “How can we assess attitudes properly?” Indeed, you’ve been asked this question many times! However, you admit that for a long time the question has left you feeling uncomfortable. Why is that?

FRANCE CÔTÉ:

The question is extremely complex, and for a long while I have preferred to leave it to researchers and experts in the field to find the answers. I must admit that there are certain problems which remain unsolved and which still present difficulties for me today.

First, there’s the tendency we have to assess attitudes in a fragmented way or by dissociating them from their competency as a whole. Such an approach is at odds with the integration of learning at the heart of competency assessment. I also find that having to assess a long list of attitudes as part of a course or internship raises questions about the time allocated to the explicit teaching of these attitudes, to giving feedback, and to allowing students the right to make mistakes. Finally, the considerable difficulty involved in developing reliable

assessment tools concerns me: several performance level scales used for assessing attitudes are imprecise, and their interpretation can vary greatly from one observer to the next.

In order to better evaluate, we have to know exactly what we are assessing. In the context of a competency-based approach, how do we define an attitude and why should we be concerned with attitudes?

fc Others before me have thoroughly documented the multifarious definitions offered within the field of social psychology and have reflected on how best to understand the concept of “an attitude” in the context of evaluating competencies at the college level (Beauchamp 2013; Gosselin 2010; Gosselin and Lussier 2015; Pratte, Ross, and Petitclerc 2014; Scallon 2004). For the most part, their definitions converge. Like Beauchamp (2013), I hold to Allport’s definition (1935), who proposed that an attitude “is a mental and neural state of readiness, organized through experience, exerting a directive or dynamic influence upon the individual’s response to all

¹ The authors would like to thank Patti Kingsmill for her substantial revision of this English version of the interview.



objects and situations with which it is related.” What I like about this definition is that it emphasizes the internal aspect of attitudes which presents the main challenge in assessing them.

We are interested in how to best evaluate attitudes because they form part of the very definition of a competency. I frequently refer back to the definition of competency proposed by Tardif (2006) which states that it is “the complex knowledge of how to act built on the effective mobilization and integration of a variety of internal and external resources within related situations. Attitudes make up part of the internal resources individuals must mobilize to carry out the tasks associated with a given competency. Since they lie at the heart of what a competency is, it makes sense that we assess them, just as we assess other aspects of student learning. Moreover, the general goals of the programs indicate which attitudes students must develop. As well, some ministerial devis explicitly incorporate attitudes into the performance criteria. As educators, we are therefore responsible to consider them part of the learning process.

Program committees interested in assessing attitudes often begin by establishing a list of attitudes essential to the program, using their own experience and program-related documents as resources. At the beginning of this interview, you mentioned such “grocery lists” as being problematic. Why are they and how can we get beyond using such lists?

fc I actually think we must avoid exhaustive lists of attitudes to be taught, developed, and assessed, and all this in addition to teaching, developing and assessing the other resources students must mobilize to demonstrate a competency. It would be better to adopt a strategy step-by-step. I encourage teams to work together as they identify the attitudes mentioned in the devis under the program goals or objectives and standards. I also encourage them to identify only a limited number of additional attitudes considered necessary for program graduates. Attitudes are by nature internalized and so take time to develop. It’s better if program committees have a clearly delineated focus for their efforts.

The other essential step that must be taken to avoid the grocery-list approach to attitudes is translating internalized attitudes into observable behaviours that serve as assessment indicators. This step allows us to develop a shared vision of what constitutes an observable demonstration of an expected attitude. Take common courtesy as an example, an attitude that

can be demonstrated in a variety of ways—opening a door, yielding to another driver, using polite forms of address with a new acquaintance, or in some cultures, lowering one’s gaze. Research on attitudes suggests that observable behaviours helps standardized the criteria by which teachers determine whether an attitude has been clearly demonstrated. Table 1 presents a few examples of attitudes that Gosselin (2010) associates with observable behaviours. This concern with the observability of learning directly lines up with the guidelines used to develop reliable tools for evaluating competencies. Assessing complex learning, whatever its nature, inevitably involves observable indicators.

TABLE 1	EXAMPLES OF OBSERVABLE BEHAVIOURS THAT DEMONSTRATE ATTITUDES (ADAPTED FROM GOSSÉLIN 2010)
ATTITUDE	OBSERVABLE BEHAVIOURS
AUTONOMY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The student seeks out needed materials and assistance on their own initiative. The student takes steps to reach assigned objectives without explicitly being asked to do so.
POLITENESS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The student greets the client with a smile. The student uses polite forms of address such as please and thank you when speaking to clients.
EMPATHY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The student takes the time to listen carefully when spoken to.
ANALYTICAL SKILLS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The student develops relevant arguments to support their ideas.
TEAM SPIRIT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The student respects the group’s decisions, even if their particular position is not adopted. The student offers to help group-mates.
ORGANIZATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The student plans the activities and accesses the resources required for an assigned task.
OPENNESS TO CRITICISM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The student is able to receive, with no debate or offense, the comments and recommendations of others (i.e., teachers, classmates, etc.).
PUNCTUALITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The student is prepared to start work on time.
PROFESSIONALISM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The student conforms to the professional code of conduct relevant to their program. The student follows the program’s rules and procedures.



Clearly, then, to properly assess attitudes, we must build on the fundamentals or principles of learning assessment. What are the principles we should keep in mind?

- fc** Your question provides a perfect segue into a discussion of some of the fundamental principles related to all kinds of learning, not just the assessment of attitudes. I'd say that, among all key the principles we need to follow, we mustn't lose sight of the following:
- Assessment is not a spontaneous but a planned activity, integral to a process which includes instructional, learning, and assessment strategies each deliberately implemented at pre-determined times.
 - In the context of competency-based education, the evaluation of learning must not be fragmented, but rather must focus on complex integrative assessments that allow the teacher to judge whether the competency as a whole has been attained.
 - A student is entitled to make mistakes. Through teacher and peer feedback, formative assessments, and self-assessments, the student must be given the opportunity to recognize their strengths and weaknesses. Feedback can at times be informal, but it should also take place more formally when well-devised assessment tools are used.
 - The interpretation of a student's performance must be based on set performance criteria. The assessment context must ensure that the student is able to carry out all the required specific complex tasks and not just certain portions of them.
 - The evaluation of student learning must attest to each student's individual attainment of the competency.
 - In exercising professional judgment and designing assessment tools, the teacher must respect certain values and qualities such as justice, equity, validity, and reliability.

In the workshops you offer, you often talk about the three **Rs** of competency assessment: **Result**, **Route**, and **Reflection**. Could you explain what they represent and the role played by attitudes in this model?

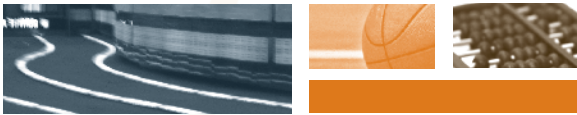
- fc** The three **Rs** represent different facets of the demonstration of a competency. **Result** is a concrete finished product: the realisation of a complex task (e.g., research, patient intake, musical performance). **Route** refers to the student's learning process, and consists of the footprints left by learning, for example,

an annotated bibliography, a portfolio, or a sketchbook. **Reflection** is the ability to engage in self-reflection regarding one's development of a competency, recognizing one's strengths and weaknesses, justifying one's choices, and proposing means for self-improvement. Filteau (2009) and Mastracci (2011), in their examination of creativity, tie affective and behavioural skills in with **Reflection**, in an expanded marking criteria category labelled Person/Discourse. Indeed, in the marking rubrics Mastracci suggests can be used for assessing creativity, the evaluation of attitudes is integrated into the descriptions of each performance level in the Person/Discourse category. We see here an interesting and inspiring proposal regarding the role attitudes can play in this model, but it has yet to be transferred to domains other than creativity.

A good descriptive marking rubric should give rise to fair, equitable, and unequivocal judgments on the demonstration of a competency in the context of performing a given task. How can these principles be applied to an attitude-assessment rubric for evaluating attitudes?

- fc** Here is where I have made some progress. A descriptive rubric is a very appropriate tool for assessing complex tasks or situations, because the descriptions that correspond to various performance levels act as guidelines for how to assess. However, the challenge in developing these rubrics is in describing the performance levels and establishing scales for them. As I mentioned at the beginning of this interview, all too often the descriptive scales used to assess attitudes don't support an unequivocal interpretation. The nature of attitudes and the variety of their outward expression is so vast that serious perceptual differences between assessors can result. Certainly, there are instructors who have developed good practices for assessing this type of learning, but those practices have not necessarily been shared, documented, or rendered accessible. I've never been fully satisfied with the attitude-assessment rubrics I've tried to develop, and this led to problems in supporting teams that wanted such a tool.

Recently, as I was thinking about how to better equip educators, and had an "ah ha!" moment. I managed to put into practice a very simple idea which consists of using affective domain taxonomies to develop a scale for the descriptions of performance levels. As you know, a taxonomy consists of a hierarchical classification of different types of skills. These skills are typically categorized into levels of increasing complexity. There are taxonomies for cognitive skills (the most famous being Bloom's), for psychomotor skills, and for affective



skills (which is our focus), as well as a numerous others that are relevant to different contexts. Legendre's *Dictionnaire actuel de l'éducation* (2005) offers a wide variety of such classifications.

I experimented with this taxonomic approach last year, by developing descriptive scales for assessing certain attitudes. The tools I consequently developed establish well-defined performance levels. It's reassuring that this approach, developed with my expertise in the field, has also been suggested by attitude-assessment experts Gosselin and Lussier. In their recent publication (2015) they suggest using affective domain taxonomies to determine levels of achievement in the development of attitudes.

In concrete terms, what should a team of teachers do to properly equip themselves to assess attitudes?

fc First and foremost, this work has to be done collaboratively in a team. In light of recent publications and studies I've consulted (Beauchamp, 2013; Gosselin, 2010; Gosselin and Lussier, 2015; Pratte, Ross, & Petitclerc, 2014), as well as my own experience in developing marking rubrics (Côté 2014), I suggest the following steps to facilitate the development of scales for assessing attitudes:

1. Identify the attitude or attitudes to be assessed, while limiting their number.
2. Translate the attitude(s) into observable behaviours.
3. Use an affective domain taxonomy to situate the expected performance levels within the program's context (see Table 2). This step is critical in order

to develop an appropriate scale for the descriptive performance levels. It can be broken into two parts:

- Develop a complete understanding of the levels of the affective-domain taxonomy (all team members must share the same vision of these).
 - Identify the taxonomic levels that correspond to the expected performance levels.
4. Describe the expected performance for each level of the scale.

These steps may seem simple to an expert in the field like you, but can you give us a concrete example of the process?

fc Take the example of the demonstration of team spirit. This **professional attitude** is important in a number of situations in which people must collaborate to complete a project. A team of teachers wishing to teach this attitude must first translate it into **observable behaviours** in order to assess it. Team spirit can manifest itself in a variety of ways. In this example (Table 3), the observable behaviour identified is the student's ability to accept the team's decisions even if their own particular position is not adopted.

Next comes the use of a **taxonomy of the affective domain**. Like Gosselin and Lussier (2015), I chose to use the taxonomy of the affective domain developed by Krathwohl, Bloom, and Masia (1964). This taxonomy has five levels: receiving, responding, valuing, organization, and characterization by value (Table 2). These hierarchical levels correspond to increasingly internalized behaviours. Receiving, for example, represents the lowest level of the taxonomy. To reach this level, students must demonstrate

TABLE 2 A SAMPLE TAXONOMY OF THE AFFECTIVE DOMAIN (ADAPTED FROM KRATHWOHL, BLOOM, AND MASIA 1964)

LEVEL (1 - 5)	PROCESS REQUIRED FOR SUCCESSFUL DEMONSTRATION	VERBS WORDS CHARACTERIZING OBSERVABLE BEHAVIOURS
1 RECEIVING	Demonstrating awareness	Differentiate, accept, choose, listen
2 RESPONDING	Understanding and reacting to directions, instructions, rules, etc.	Comply with, follow, volunteer
3 VALUING	Demonstrating commitment to a value rather than acting to please or obey	Improve, support, justify
4 ORGANIZATION	Integrating a new value into existing value systems	Compare, discuss, analyze, organize, standardize
5 CHARACTERIZATION	Acting consistently in accordance with values that have been internalized over time	Change, embody, practice



an awareness of their attitudes and behaviours. At the other end of hierarchy is “characterization,” reached when someone has not only internalized the desired attitude and its behaviours, but their learning has developed into a value system that directs their actions. Depending on the context, the different performance levels of a descriptive rubric can be associated with some of these taxonomic levels.

In developing this descriptive scale (Table 3), it was decided that the minimal performance level should correspond to the “receiving” taxonomic level. In other words, to obtain a passing grade, students should at least be capable of recognizing their own weaknesses without compromising the group’s work. It was also decided that the “satisfactory” performance level would correspond to the “responding” level, and the “excellent” level with “valuing.” There is also the description of the performance level(s) considered “insufficient.” These levels must equally be associated with observable learning. It’s important to avoid negative descriptions that express what undesirable student behaviour entails and instead seek to describe behaviours typical of students at this level.

The descriptions at each level are guidelines that help orient the judgment process. It’s important to keep in mind that other groups or other attitudes may lead to different taxonomic associations.

France Côté, you have shared with us a well-reasoned and documented method for assessing attitudes. It’s time to transfer it to other attitudes and different contexts. What is the most important take-away you hope readers of *Pédagogie Collégiale* will gain from this interview?

fc I hope that my having shared my reflections on these matters will help spread the word about this practice and that, as a result, readers will develop their own tools for assessing attitudes. I hope that the highlighted principles, suggested process, and concrete examples I’ve shared will feed into their own work in this area.

Our collective knowledge about attitude assessment is still being constructed. That’s why we all benefit by building on our shared experience. ◀

TABLE 3 DESCRIPTIVE SCALE FOR ASSESSING TEAM SPIRIT (INVOLVING PERFORMANCE LEVELS BASED ON A TAXONOMY OF THE AFFECTIVE DOMAIN)				
ATTITUDE: DEMONSTRATION OF A PRODUCTIVE TEAM SPIRIT. OBSERVABLE BEHAVIOUR: THE STUDENT ACCEPTS THE GROUP’S DECISIONS EVEN IF THEIR OWN VIEWS HAVE NOT BEEN ADOPTED.				
EXCELLENT 10 points	SATISFACTORY 8 points	MINIMAL (standard of performance) 6 points	INSUFFICIENT(weak) 4 points	ABSENT 2 points or less
The student expresses their opinions while clearly demonstrating an ability to accept group decisions even if their own position is not adopted. Their behaviour contributes to the quality of the group work.	The student demonstrates appropriate behaviour . They occasionally experience problems accepting group decisions if their own particular position is not adopted, but generally comply with expectations and instructions by participating productively in group work.	The student is receptive , capable of realizing they struggle to accept group decisions if their own particular position is not adopted. They are aware of the problem, recognize it, and demonstrate a willingness to improve but cannot help but express their dissatisfaction whether verbally or non-verbally. Apart from the disagreeable nature of this behaviour, because they support the group’s decision, they do not compromise its progress or the quality of its work.	The student is receptive , able to recognize they struggle to accept group decisions if their own particular position is not adopted. They are aware of the problem and claim they want to improve, but in fact their verbal and non-verbal behaviour compromises the group’s progress or the quality of its work. They continue to insist on their own ideas.	The student is resistant . They are convinced that the problem lies in the fact that others are having difficulties accepting their ideas.



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INVITATION

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