

Translocal Assessment and Competencies: Using a Proficiency-based Learning Management System

Joel C. Yuvienco,

Edu 2.0 Country Representative, Philippines

email: joel.yuvienco@gmail.com

Noel R. Buensuceso

Associate Professor, College of Business, Entrepreneurship and Accountancy

Miriam College

Katipunan Avenue, Loyola Heights Quezon City Philippines

Tel: +6325805400

email: noel.buensuceso@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper explores the opportunities and challenges of learning assessment in a learners' world that is increasingly marked by mobility across regional and temporal boundaries.

In particular, the paper will demonstrate the use of evidence-based assessment tools that transcend global standards using a Proficiency-based Learning Management System.

The rationale behind this approach is the need to: make proof of student assessment portable; dynamically track student performance; and allow for adaptive programming of lessons and associated assessment.

Side benefit of proficiency-based LMS is the promotion of accountability and transparency in reporting assessment.

Overall the challenge is finding the right-mix of traditional and ICT-enabled assessment. Hence, continuous professional development training on rapidly evolving technologies for education is encouraged.

Sub-theme: Innovation and Best Practices in ODeL

Keywords

Assessment, ePortfolios, Learning Management System

Introduction

The world has moved past the first decade of the 21st century C.E., wherein people have been able to go about their personal and professional affairs beyond the constraints of time zones and spatial boundaries. This is largely driven by a range of factors, not the least of which is the rapid changes in Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). Even so, those affairs or activities have naturally moved into the realm of formal learning, particularly, online or even blended learning. Yet even as people could leverage the power of those technologies for learning, there seems to be little by way of making student learning outcomes or records of assessment more mobile or portable from an institutional perspective. This is largely due to the inherently closed-systems or what is called walled-gardens of information systems around formal learning.

This paper thus explores the opportunities and challenges of learning assessment where the current learner population lives in a globally-connected generation that is increasingly marked by mobility across regional boundaries.

While the richness, breadth, and depth of possibilities in learning at the higher education level is a function of the diversity of political, social, cultural and economic realities around the world, those differences could work as a barrier when demonstrating evidence of meeting educational

curriculum standards. Content that is taught at one institution of learning does not automatically map to those of another institution. Within the same national boundaries, high standard in one school does not necessarily equate to another. One has only to ask about college entrance examinations to get a response pointing to different processes representing varying levels of difficulty. So what more about records of assessment when moving from one school to another, let alone use those credentials for employment. In the same vein, how does a particular assessment record transcend boundaries of time and space?

A practical response could be the use of evidence-based assessment tools that can be flexibly programmed to cut across global standards. This may not be a compelling idea to meet current mainstream requirements of Higher Education as proof of learning achievement is still dominated by assessment of learning, via standardized or departmental (or norm-referenced) tests.

However, considering that there is growing recognition of ePortfolios, as more criterion-referenced, validation of learning, it may not be very long when those assessment tools would become a more viable option. In Australia, for example, as early as 2007, there was already “a groundswell of interest and activity around ePortfolios in Universities.” (Lambert & Corrin, 2007)

As a parallel development alongside the global growth of ICT-enabled learning that is learner-centered, it may also become necessary to start thinking more seriously about making evidence of student learning portable, tracking student performance dynamically, and enabling adaptive programming of lessons and assessment.

It goes without saying that traditional methods of keeping records and assessment reports are inefficient and labor-intensive, not to mention that they do not scale. However, the online or ICT-enabled approach, e.g. via the Internet, for all its vaunted power, may lack the authenticity of the face-to-face interaction which comes from the dynamic of the up-close and personal, and the here and now.

What this suggests however is the alternative of getting the right blend of in-person and ICT-mediated assessment of learning, for learning and by learning.

Learning Management Systems

A right blend could be achieved from the same perspective that activities associated broadly with teaching and of learning could be attained. The enabler comes in the form of learning management systems. These are ICT-based platforms that combine course design, delivery and distribution of materials, resources, test banks, calendar, and student data. Those platforms also operate as collaborative space using popular tools that include blogs, wikis, chatrooms, survey tools, etc.

Edu 2.0, a cloud-based platform is one such Learning Management System. Now while there are other systems that combine a broad range of teaching and learning functionality, Edu 2.0 shall be used in this paper to demonstrate the value of evidence-based tools for translocal assessment of competencies.



Figure 1.

Curriculum

While a learning management system provides a space for storing, sharing, and delivering learning resources and materials, having a curriculum as a resource is essential in keeping the purpose or objective of learning in place. This component allows for the learning management system to provide some sort of a learning compass.

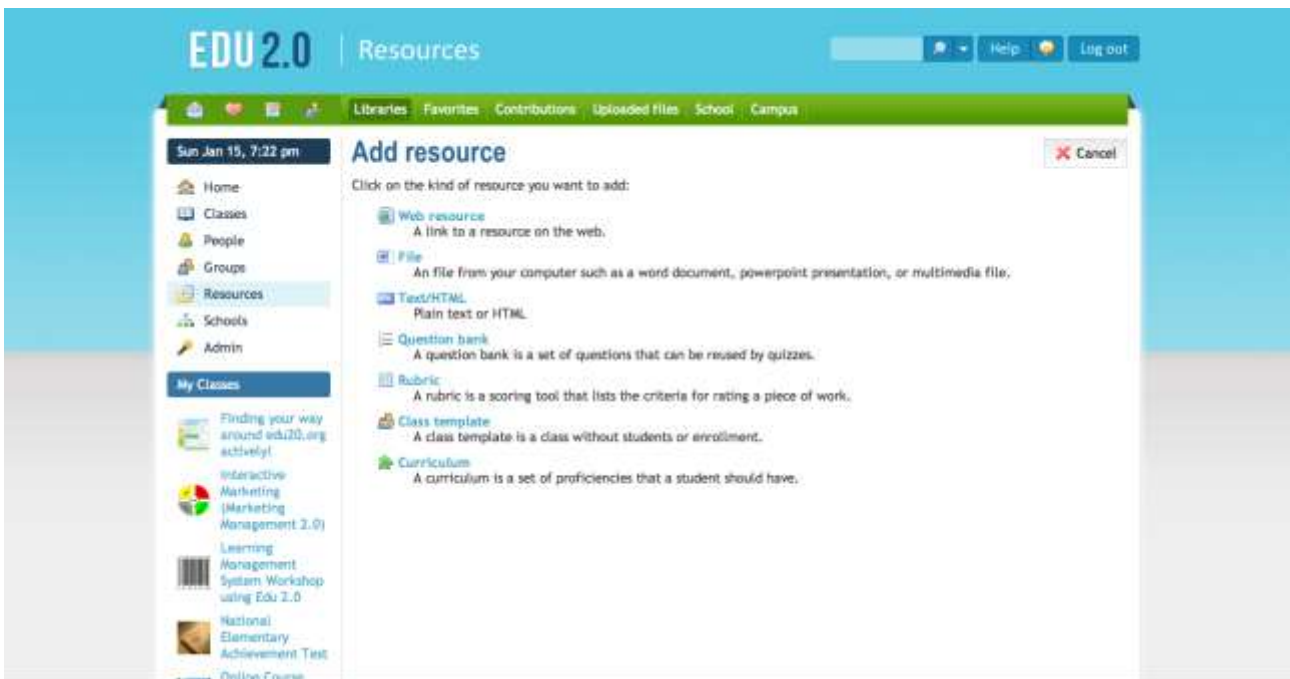


Figure 2.

Curriculum plotted on edu 2.0

Curriculum is not complete without a reference to its sub-components, in the form of proficiencies or competencies that a learner is expected to possess at the end or upon successful completion of a course or subject.

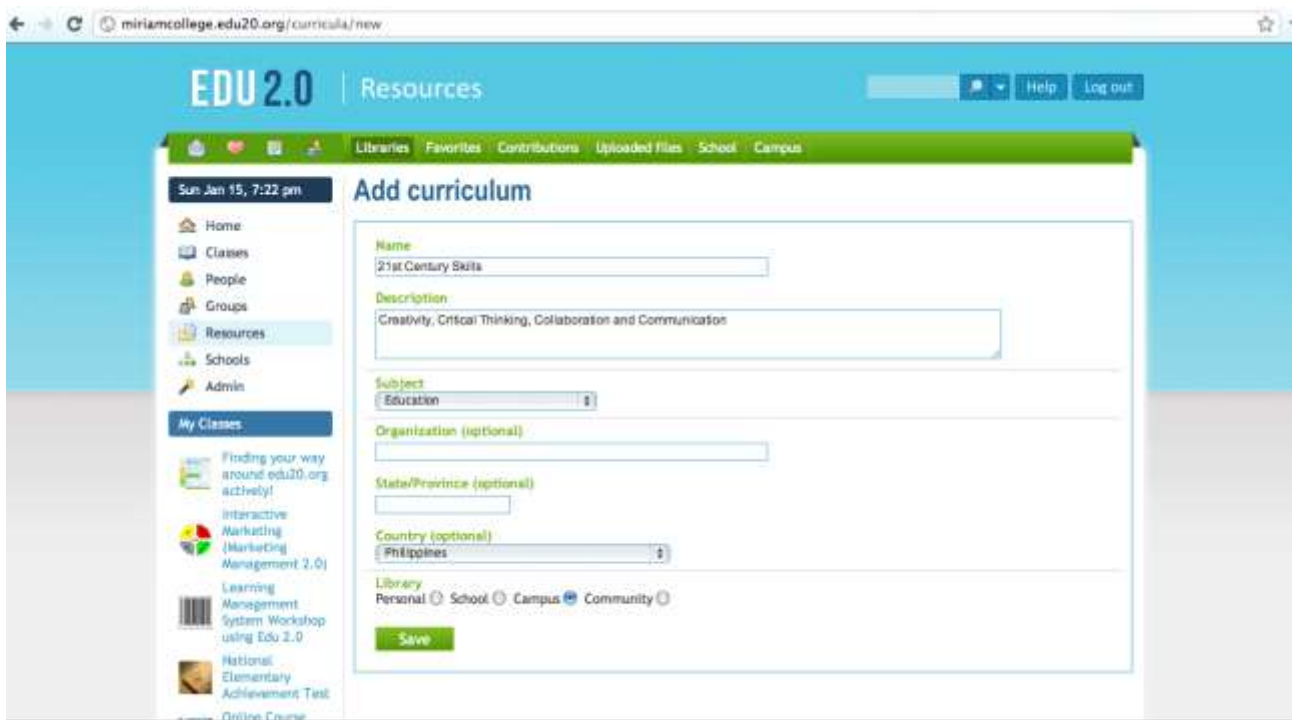


Figure 3.

The figure below would show the details of a curriculum, i.e., 21st Century Skills, comprising the proficiencies of Creativity, Critical Thinking, Collaboration and Communication. (Figure 3.)

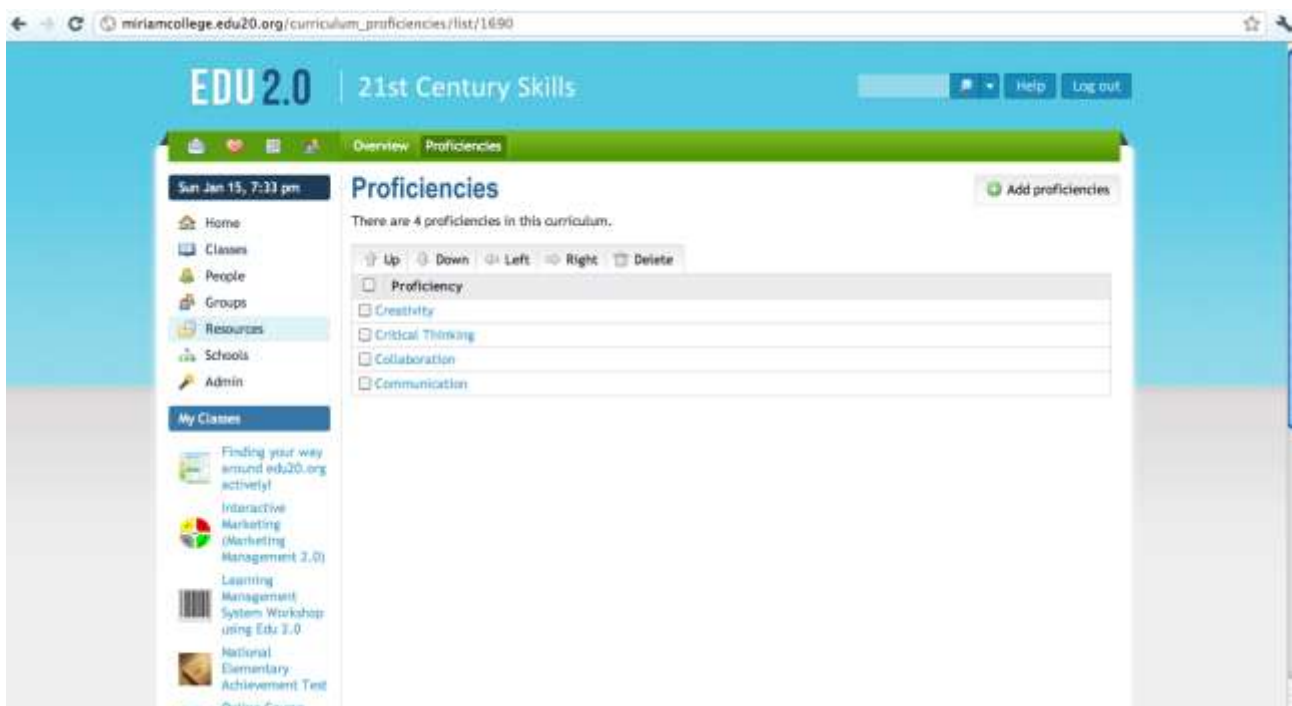
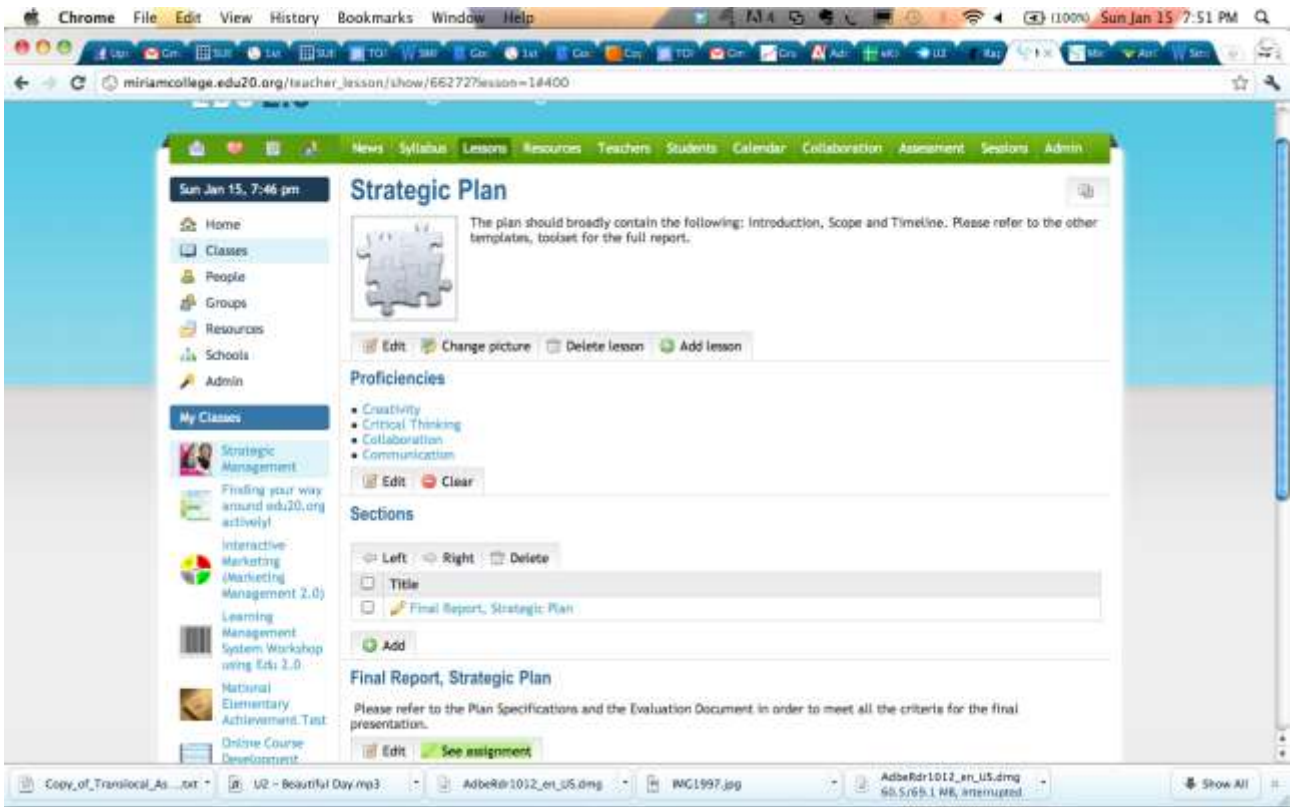


Figure 4.

The Lesson (Strategic Plan) below is considered as a Proficiency-tagged lesson - the first of two layers of mapping a Curriculum to a course. This means that the topic or lesson is associated with all four proficiencies in the proficiency map. Please note that mapping a proficiency set to a lesson (or a series of lessons) can be done using one, some or even all of the proficiencies in accordance



with the requirements of the course.

Figure 5.

Figure 5 and Figure 6 together demonstrate the second layer of mapping a curriculum to a course, i.e. via proficiency-tagged assignment.

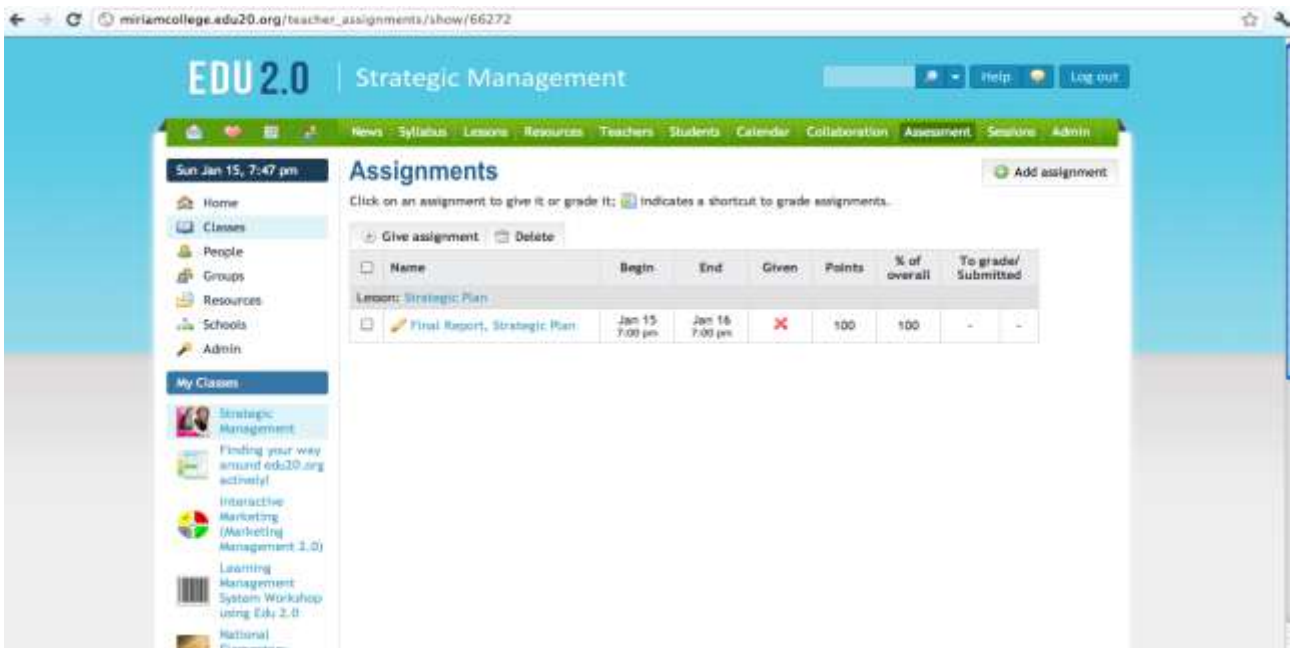


Figure 6.

It may be noted that criterion-referenced assessment is usually done using rubrics. The figure below shows an option to integrate and program a suitable set of rubrics.

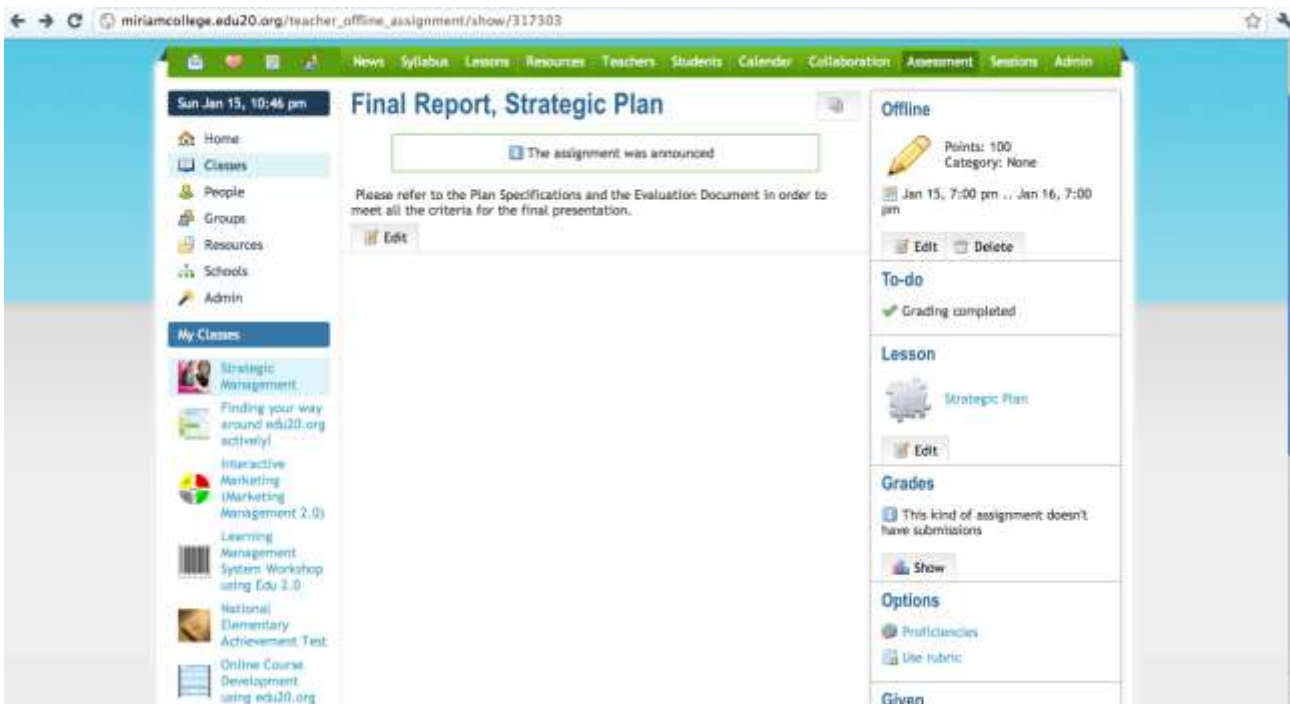


Figure 7.

A Proficiency Map is not just a list of to-dos for purposes of identifying expected learning outcomes. Thus it is necessary for a teacher doing assessment to have access to an analytical tool to show extent of curriculum coverage from both the teaching (delivering lessons) to measuring the learner's acquisition or production of new knowledge. Thus the proficiency coverage below would show green whenever, a lesson has (or lessons have) both been taught and assessed; yellow, if a

lesson has (or lessons have) been taught but not assessed; or red, when lesson has (lessons have) been assessed but not taught, according to the associated proficiencies.

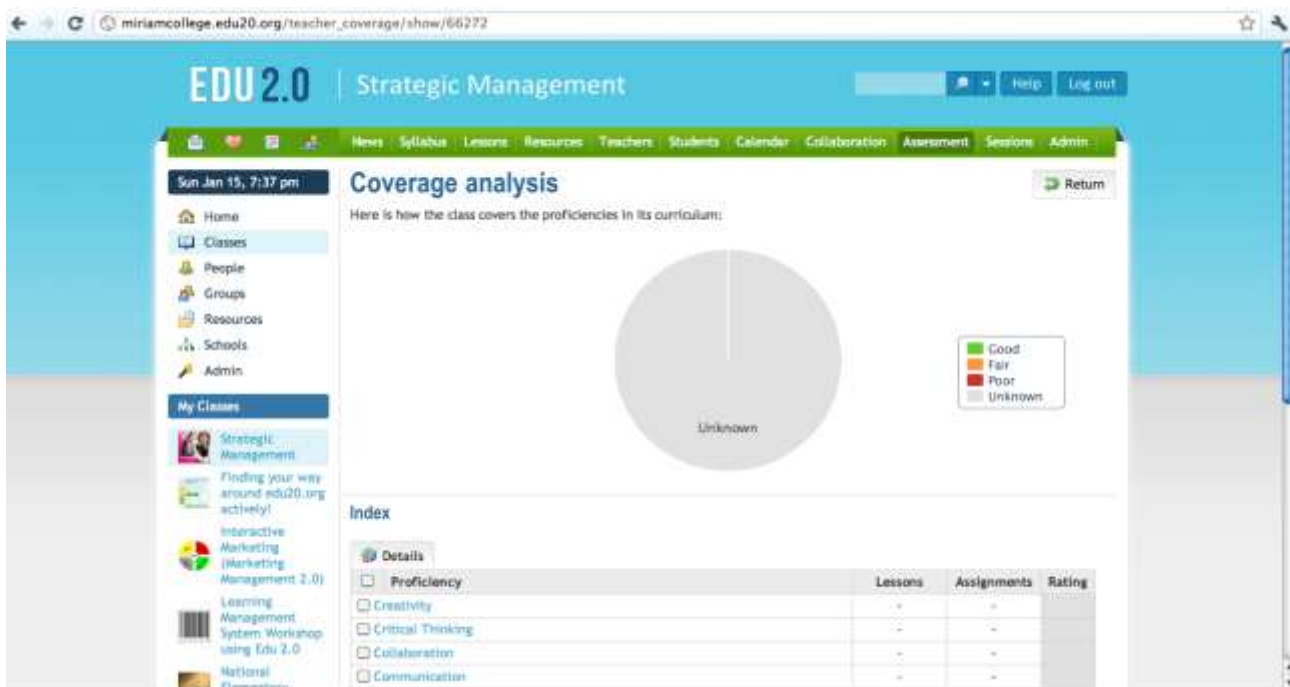


Figure 7.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The given framework and processes discussed above demonstrates that mapping a curriculum with its set of proficiencies to a course syllabus with its lessons, resources, and assessments could provide a mechanism for what could be called a “Proficiency Accountability”. Apart from the benefit of accountability to all learning stakeholders, e.g., learner, parents, teachers, school administration, a proficiency-based LMS also promotes transparency of the assessment processes.

Recommendations

Overall the challenge is finding the right-mix of traditional and ICT-enabled assessment. The bottom line could be seeing the “proof of the pudding” as far as student achievement goes in a globally competency-driven world. In the context of education reform, this rather complex approach of proficiency-based assessment, being data-driven, could also help inform policy makers. Yet there is obviously an added demand on teachers. It thus becomes clear that

continuous professional development training especially on rapidly evolving technologies for education could hardly be an option.

References

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[http://uow.academia.edu/LindaCorrin/Papers/306307/From_optional_to_mandatory_to_assessed_updating_models_of_university_student_ePortfolio_use] Downloaded on January 15, 2012