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3. Knowing the learner

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The more you know about your students, the more effective a teacher you will be. Information gathering is essential to effective planning. This chapter contains assessment tools teachers can use to know their students' abilities, strengths, modalities, personalities, likes and dislikes related to learning. This information is combined with content knowledge-assessment data to diagnose problems, plan for unique needs and provide optimal learning opportunities. Use these strategies to lead individuals to know themselves as learners. Apply what you know about the students to customise assessment experiences.

4. Assessing before and during learning

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Ongoing assessment before and during learning is used to recognise needs, provide assistance with skills, clarify directions, motivate and guide instruction. This chapter presents preassessment tools, including observation, response cards, inventories, surveys, brainstorming, self-talk skills and note taking. These tools are designed to set entry points for planning that address individual strengths and needs. Assessment during learning is designed to closely monitor each student's progress to 'zap the gaps' during the learning journey.

5. Assessing after the learning

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Traditionally, assessment after the learning measures the learner's mastery of stated objectives. We now know that we need to provide multiple measures and give students more than one way to demonstrate that they have met standards and learning goals. Differentiated assessment provides opportunities for students to apply mastery of skills in new ways for practice and review to reinforce learning. This chapter guides teachers in effective questioning techniques for student reflection and self-analysis. Sample rubrics, Likert scales, check lists, writing samples and prompts, graphic organisers, teacher-made tests, portfolios, journals and more are featured. Ideas for anecdotal record keeping and grading are explored. Effective teachers present learning and assessment experiences as intriguing adventures.

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<p><i>Incorporate differentiated assessment strategies that meet accountability standards for teaching and learning. Develop a repertoire of ideas to differentiate during standardised tests for improved performances. Learn to make allowable accommodations, create positive testing environments, give effective directions and teach test-taking and self-regulating skills.</i></p>	
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Introduction

One tool doesn't fit all

Effective teachers strategically select an appropriate assessment tool for each learning situation. In the same way that a carpenter chooses a hammer to drive a nail and a saw to cut a board, the teacher chooses the right tool for each purpose. Rich data is gathered using a wide variety of instruments. This allows students to show what they know in more than one way. In short, it takes more than one form of assessment or more than one tool, to gauge individual learning.

What is differentiated assessment?

Differentiated assessment is an ongoing process through which teachers gather data before, during and after instruction from multiple sources to identify learners' needs and strengths. Students are differentiated in their knowledge and skills. They differ in the ways and speeds at which they process new learning and connect it to prior knowledge and understanding. They also differ in the ways they most effectively demonstrate their progress.

Choosing the right tools

The carpenter uses his expertise to choose the right tool for the procedure, the materials and the task at hand. The same principles apply to teachers and students on a far more sophisticated and consequential level. The teacher who plans instruction to accommodate the differences among students designs or selects the best preassessment tools. This reveals students' unique knowledge, prior experiences, abilities, learning styles, multiple intelligences, motivations, behaviours, interests and attitudes. The results are used to strategically customise instructional plans, provide students with multiple ways to show their learning, keep them on the right track and accelerate their learning journeys.



Ongoing assessment

Formal testing emphasises assessment *of* learning. It is an evaluation of the student's progress at the end of a unit or a period of time. Compare it to a final building inspection. Before calling for the final inspection, the builder conducts ongoing progress checks at all stages of construction. Think about the value of ongoing assessment *for* learning or informal assessment.

For another perspective on the importance of ongoing assessments for learning, picture the following scene. A race car has arrived on the track for a major race. Before the race begins, the crew and driver thoroughly check their car's engine, tires, brakes and safety equipment. During the race, they continue to assess the vehicle so it maintains maximum performance and speed. The driver occasionally pulls into the pit so the crew can replace parts, add fuel, change tyres and provide other needed services. If the driver and crew wait until the end of the race to monitor the car's performance, it will be too late to make repairs and adjustments. Think about a learner's performance in the classroom. Is it reasonable to wait until the end of a unit, a term or a set period of time to assess their performance?

Clarifying the differentiated assessment terminology

The following definitions are presented to clarify the ways the terms are used in this resource:

Assessment: a judgment or appraisal of the learner's work and specific needs. The direction for immediate and future instruction is based on information gathered with formal or informal procedures.

Assessment activity: an exercise that actively engages the student, physically or cognitively, in the assessment process.

Assessment choices: ways to provide the learner with assessment options, such as a report or a demonstration. Providing choices is a powerful change that immediately differentiates and empowers learners.

Assessment skill: the learner's effectiveness and proficiency in applying an assessment tool. For example, the ability to use a matrix to record information is a skill in using a graphic organiser strategy.

Assessment strategy: a plan or procedure used to reach a goal. Journaling can be used as an assessment strategy during learning or as a way to develop a cumulative record of learning. Remember, a strategy is the umbrella for skills and tools. It is more global.

Assessment tool: a way to assess the student. The assessment tools include activities or devices that provide information or data for instructional plan-

ning before, during and after learning. For example, a reflective sentence starter such as 'I don't understand' is a tool for metacognition.

Authentic assessment: an analysis of the learner's skills, abilities and strengths through a variety of observable indicators. This includes skill performances, purposeful activities, portfolios, demonstrations, hands-on experiences and projects.

Evaluation: a summative analysis of the learner's abilities and skills at a particular time to make judgments. Evaluation data is traditionally gathered at the end of a unit of study, a term or the year.

Formal assessment: tools that collect specific, observable information. This data may be derived from content knowledge, skills and abilities or behaviour observations. Tests, quizzes, check lists, rubrics and Likert scales are examples of formal assessment tools.

Formative assessment: ongoing assessment before, during and after instruction to identify needs and provide continuous feedback so the student learns more effectively. Usually only selected results from identified formative assessments are averaged and included in a formal grade.

Informal assessment: tools that gather information from spontaneous, gut reactions for the moment. Response cards and hand signals that indicate individual knowledge of a topic or skill are examples of informal assessments.

Ipsative assessment: describes a form of metacognitive self-assessment by which the learner compares a present performance with a prior performance to measure improvement and address needs.

Standard: a benchmark or level of mastery for specific skills. These objectives are usually established by the state for each year level and subject area.

Summative assessment: assessments that occur at the end of a period of instruction to measure achievement. The results are usually used as evidence for a grade, for reporting to parents, to identify award recipients or to make placement decisions.

Analysing your view of differentiated assessment

Consider the following questions as a preassessment of your disposition toward differentiated assessment, related teaching experiences and beliefs in relation to this philosophy.

We offer the following acronym as a reminder to all of us of how to strategically apply differentiated assessment strategies.

Analyse individual strengths and needs

Strategically plan for each learner to improve and excel

Set new objectives

Explore abilities

Supply assistance and appropriate materials

Stress growth

Monitor for immediate intervention

Empower with self-directed assessment strategies

Nurture and support efforts

Translate needs and strengths into active learning

Post this list on your wall and in your heart. Share it with your students, their parents and your learning community to help students become lifelong metacognitive learners.

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Table 1.1 Why students forget and why they remember

<i>Why students forget</i>	<i>What does it mean?</i>	<i>Memory solutions</i>
Interference	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New information and thoughts block concentration. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teach attention strategies • Use intriguing activities • Remove distractions • Provide attention prompts
Retroactive inhibition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two or more similar bits of information enter the brain at the same time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teach similar pieces of information separately and thoroughly using different strategies • Present distinguishing examples or steps
Proactive inhibition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Previously learned information interferes with new learning. • The information or skill did not have distinguishing features or characteristics. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide detailed attributes or descriptors • Create buy-in to the value of the new information • Apply the new information to the learner's world
Cue dependent forgetting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The retrieval cue was not a meaningful hook for the information. • The memory tool was not rehearsed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overlearn mnemonic techniques • Practise for automaticity
Decay theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The information was not used. • 'If you don't use it, you lose it!' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply it • Practise • Review • Use it in new situations

following examples. Create examples for your topics of study from the italicised list of categories to assist the learners as they mentally manipulate and process new terms.

Make personal connections

Discuss ways students observe or apply _____ in their everyday activities. This provides personal connections and associations with the term and makes students more conscious of the benefit and frequency of its use in their present and future lives.

Choose one or two topics from the following list to introduce and explain to students how assessment is experienced in their daily activities: