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3

Starting the SCORE Process

Nothing is particularly hard if you divide it into small jobs.

—Henry Ford

Although creating formative, short-cycle assessments for an entire school or school region might seem like an overwhelming task, dividing it into small jobs makes it much easier. That is why we have divided the short-cycle assessment process into eight parts, all which fit together to create formative assessments that could change the culture of your school.

This process is called the SCORE Process. SCORE stands for:

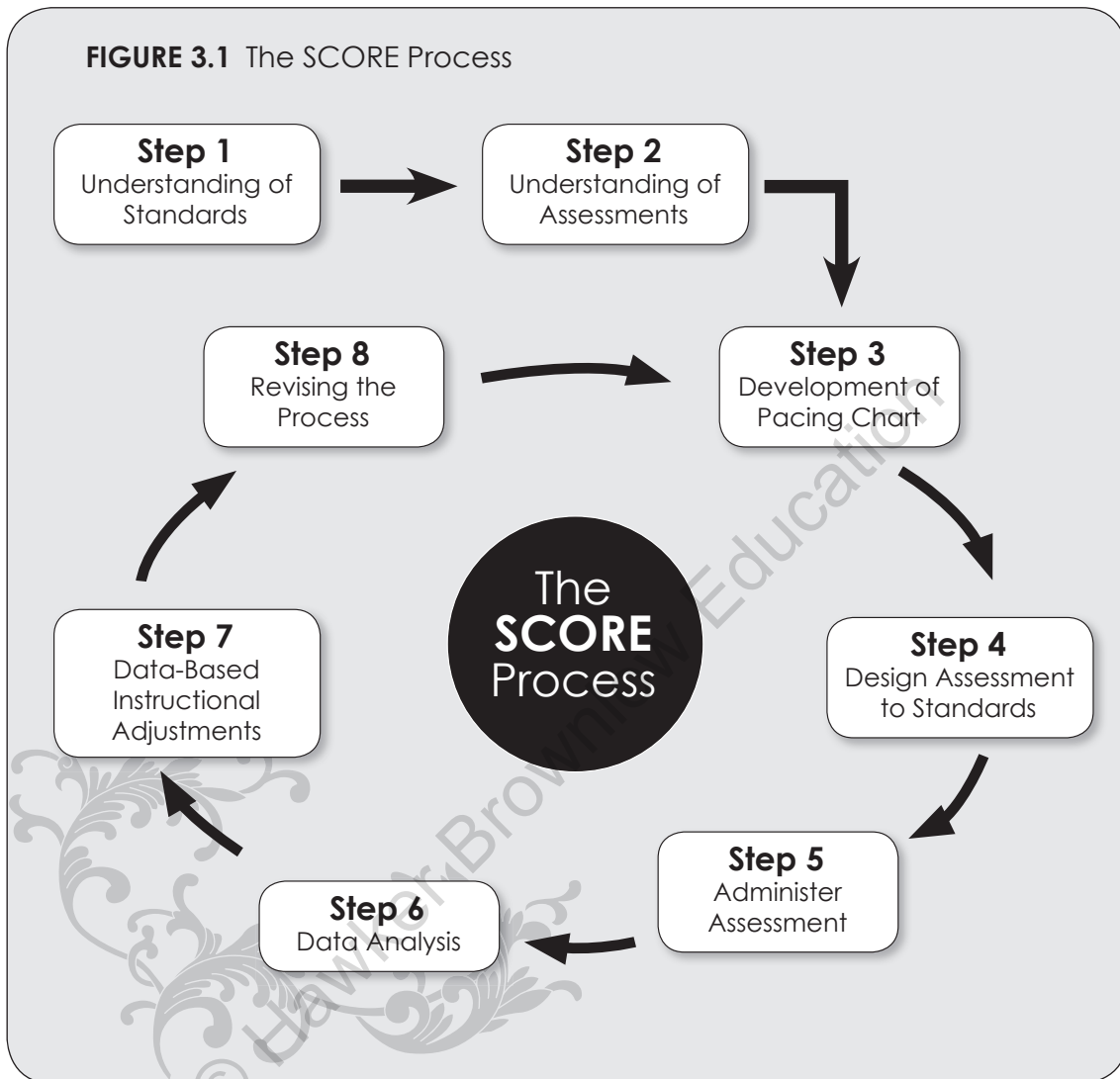
S—Short
C—Cycle assessments
O—Organised for
R—Results and
E—Expectations

Figure 3.1 illustrates the SCORE Process and its eight steps. None of these steps is particularly difficult when divided up among your professional learning community. Take it one step at a time for a fairly smooth process. This chapter will cover Steps 1 and 2 of the SCORE Process.

What Does Everyone Know?

The first two steps of the SCORE Process involve the understanding of the learning standards and assessment. It is important to figure out the level of expertise of each of the members within the PLC. Do some people successfully integrate the standards into their classroom curriculum





already, while others do not adhere to the standards at all? Are there people who are aware there is a national assessment program (NAPLAN) but that is about all they know, compared with people who may have sat on the committee that helped write the assessment? Figuring out the level of expertise in a PLC is similar to finding out what students know in a classroom. You don't want to waste time reviewing something everyone already knows, but at the same time you don't want to assume and not teach something they need.

One way to avoid guessing about the knowledge level of the PLC is to begin with an activity called a "consensogram". In this activity a question is placed on a piece of poster paper and participants rate themselves in terms of their understanding and expertise. There can be as many pieces of poster paper as there are questions. Examples of questions that will lead to knowing the level of expertise with regard to the first step in the SCORE Process might be:

Identifying Power Standards

The general idea behind a pacing chart is to take all the standards for a given subject area and divide them up over the school year. However, some teachers do not feel the need to assess every single standard. They would rather focus on those standards that are the most important. These are called *power standards*. The trick is to correctly identify power standards. Just because a PLC becomes convinced a standard does not qualify as a power standard does not mean it isn't going to be on a high-stakes test. We suggest a three-pronged criteria to identify power standards.

Criteria #1—Skills needed for success in the content area

Criteria #2—Essential knowledge and skills that transfer across the curriculum

Criteria #3—Standards assessed on the test

Once you identify power standards, you should not ignore the other standards. The idea is that you prioritise, not eliminate. All of the standards will still need to be taught and assessed in day-to-day practices, but the focus is on these power standards for the purposes of developing your formative short-cycle assessments.

Skills Needed for Success in the Content Area

The first criteria to consider when choosing power standards is determining what essential knowledge and skills are critical for a student to succeed in a specific content area. You can sit down as a group and have a general discussion concerning what skills the PLC feels are valuable based on teaching and educational experience. This type of work can best be done within a PLC that is content-based, but even if the PLC contains members of many different content areas and year levels, this task can be fairly easy. The basic knowledge about the skills in this case would come from the teacher teaching in that content area. Then, all the members of the PLC could weigh in, asking clarifying questions and narrowing the focus on the skills.

An activity to determine the skills necessary for success in a content area is the Hope List activity. The activity begins with subject area teachers working together to answer the following question:

What are 5 skills you hope every student graduating from this school has with regard to your subject area?

Allow group members some time to discuss and debate this question while compiling the list. Make sure to qualify that these are content skills, not behavioural or work study skills such as being polite, completing homework or being able to function in society (although those things would be nice). To develop power standards, it is imperative in this first step of the process to concentrate on content-specific skills only. Even though primary teachers may be taking part in this, they might feel there are building blocks they impart to students early on that should be carried through to graduation, such as reading skills and maths basics. If you have a particularly large PLC, you might want to break these groups up even further rather than have a group of ten



or more. Try to mix together various year level teachers rather than letting them sit with their year levels. This of course presents its own set of challenges: if forming a PLC across different schools, you will really need to think outside the box as far as scheduling meetings, since the two groups are often on very different schedules. Having a half or full day of professional development sessions worked into the school calendar is a good way to do this.

When the group members have compiled their Hope Lists, have them organise them on poster paper to share with the rest of the group. If working with a multiple subject-area PLC, you may end up with several different lists. An example of a Social Studies Hope List is shown below:

- Students will have a global awareness.
- Students will be able to read a map.
- Students will understand that history repeats itself.
- Students will know the history of our country.

Notice in this list there are a mixture of basic skills and concept skills. It's perfectly fine to have both of these included. Remind participants to think of this as everything they hope for. There is a blank *Hope List* in the Resources section on page 107.

Across the Curriculum

Now that the important skills for each subject area have been identified, the next step in the power standards process is for the PLC to figure out what essential knowledge and skills are valuable in multiple content areas. In other words, what skills, when mastered by students, will enable them to be successful in all content areas? The ability of reading comprehension is important in every class, not just in English, for example. Think of the directions you read for maths, which must be understood in order to do the problems or the comprehension required to understand an experiment in science. All of these require the ability to comprehend, thus the skill of reading comprehension is a skill that would carry across the curriculum.

For this part of the PLC process, teachers need not be in their subject area groups and, in fact, it might be advantageous to divide the PLC into smaller groups with a mix of the subject areas to get different perspectives. Instruct the smaller groups to brainstorm cross-curricular skills together. Once again, remind them that this is a skill-based activity. Avoid answers like bringing a pencil to class, coming to school on time or being motivated. Here are some types of skills this list might include:

- Students will be able to infer.
- Students will be able to understand what they read.
- Students will be able to read maps, charts and graphs.
- Students will be organised in their writing.
- Students will be able to use a dictionary.
- Students will have legible handwriting.





6

Administering and Marking the Assessments

Context is always as relevant as concept.

—Terry Olson

Now that the assessments have been written by the PLC, it may feel as if the process is finished. Unfortunately the work is only half done. There is still plenty left to do to prepare students for high-stakes testing. In the introduction of this book we promised formative short-cycle assessments would have four benefits, the four E's. They looked like this:

1. **Exposure:** To give students planned and purposeful exposure to the standards and formats.
2. **Expertise:** To develop expertise in each teacher's ability to ask higher-level questions, base instructional decisions for delivery on performance data and collaborate for curricular direction across year levels.
3. **Endurance:** To build resilience and endurance for each student to be able to a) sit through the test and b) work through difficult questions.
4. **Empower:** To empower students and their parents to become responsible decision makers for learning.

Up until this point, the *exposure* has been accomplished through the use of the Pacing Chart, which makes learning the standards intentional for students. The *expertise* of the teachers has been increased through the work within the PLC—the creation of the Taxonomy Table, the writing of the actual assessments and the sharing of ideas and collaboration. Now comes the time to work on the *endurance* of the students. This can be done by administering the assessments in a purposeful manner.

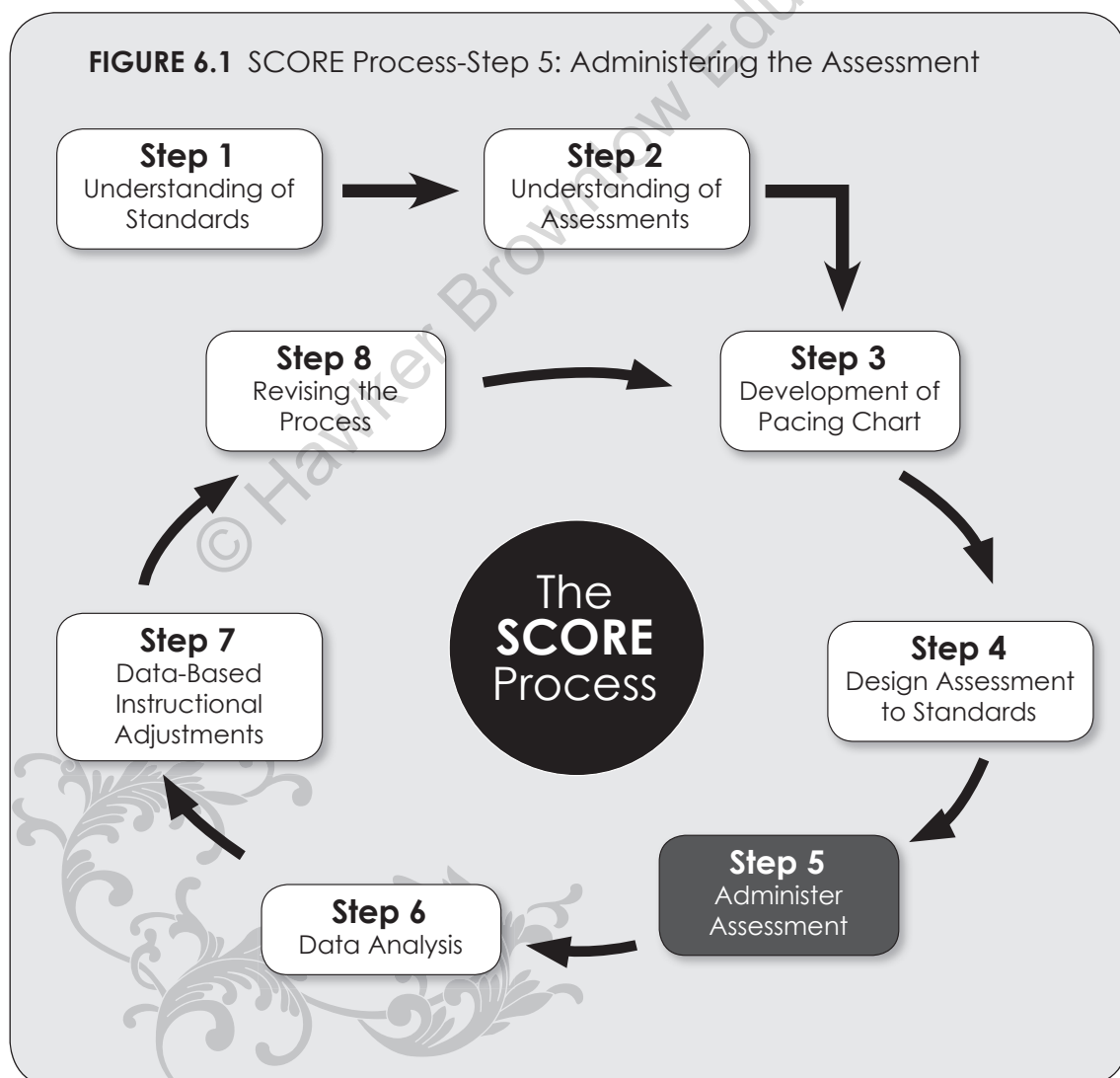


When your PLC rolls out the first assessment, it needs to be an organised effort that models the final testing process as much as possible. This is also part of the exposure to the test. If students are comfortable with testing conditions and become familiar with them, it will not seem so foreign when the final tests are given. This will be a substantial advantage for the students.

Administering the Assessment

This brings us to Step 5 of the SCORE Process, administering the assessment, Figure 6.1. During this step, the PLC will want to develop a plan to administer the assessment. This plan should be well thought out with several important considerations. Some of these are:

- How does the school administer its tests?
 - Two in a day, one a day, all in a single week, spread out over 2 weeks?



- Is everyone on board and knows the plan?
- Are there consistent directions for the assessments?
- Does the regular school schedule need to be altered?
 - Have the proper people (administrators, specials teachers, speech) been notified?
- Are the rooms being used similar to the setup students will experience with the final tests?
- Have you considered accommodations for those students who need them?
 - Are there students who need the test read to them or need someone to write for them?
- Are there year levels or teachers not taking part in this? If so, are they aware of the process and will they make sure the noise level in their classrooms and hallways will not be distracting?

The PLC should hold a meeting to discuss these considerations rather than having someone decree them such as an administrator or curriculum coordinator. Through discussions over these decisions and by creating a schedule, teachers will be able to establish the proper assessment-administration environment.

Creating the Proper Environment

There are several things to consider when creating the proper environment for the administration of the assessment. You might view the formative short-cycle assessment as a dress rehearsal for final testing. In a proper dress rehearsal, everything is done in the exact same manner as the final performance. You have the costumes, you move the scenery, you speak the lines loudly. The cast is put through everything they will experience on opening night; the only difference is there is no audience to judge them. Similarly, the only thing that should be different in the formative short-cycle assessments experience is the lack of judgment. The purpose of a dress rehearsal for a play is to notice any problems and fix them before the audience sees them. In the same vein, short-cycle assessments should be used to locate gaps in student skills so they can be addressed before the final test.

When creating the proper environment, everything from the morning announcements, to the restroom schedule, to the classroom set up, should be the same. For instance, if during the final test, students are seated no more than 20 to a room and must sign out in order to use the restroom, the formative short-cycle assessment environment should be the same. If the state assessment has a time limit, which most of them do, then a comparable time limit should be established for the short-cycle assessment. Since this is a short-cycle assessment, without as many questions as the actual test, an appropriate time limit needs to be determined. For instance, if your final test allots 60 minutes to take the English test and if you have half as many questions on your short-cycle assessment, then a time limit of 30 minutes may be appropriate. This serves to get students used to managing their time.

Because you are unfolding these formative short-cycle assessments in a PLC, it is important as a group that you are consistent. All teachers giving the common assessment will want to do

