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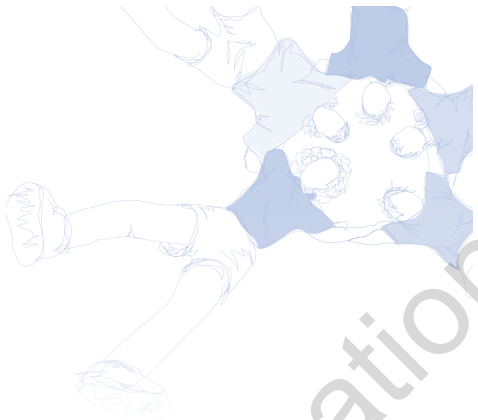

Preface

Research has shown that involving students in classroom assessment results in considerable gains in achievement, "amongst the largest ever reported for educational interventions" (Black and Wiliam, 1998). Because of this, educators are seeking new methods to help them verify where students are on their learning journey and give students the information they need to take their next steps. This book is designed to outfit educators and students with a framework for a safe, successful experience.

Before setting out on an unfamiliar path, seasoned adventurers prepare themselves by seeking out the tools and gear needed to make the trip a success. Hikers know the importance of good boots in providing them with secure footing, solid support, safety and protection on the trail, as well as the comfort they need to keep on going to the end.

Assessment *for* learning tools provide a strong foundation for teachers to work with their students in planning and carrying out quality classroom assessment. These methods, like good hiking boots, will support learners and give them a sound footing for their lifelong learning journey. By participating in the assessment process, students experience safety in knowing what to expect on the road, and comfort and security in the recognition of their own achievement. As well, teachers find it more exciting and rewarding to share the path towards the learning destination with actively engaged students.

Making Classroom Assessment Work offers ideas to be explored and adapted. Questions in each chapter help teachers identify key decision points in planning their own individual strategies and carrying out assessment *for* learning in a way that fits their classrooms. Making these thoughtful decisions is the first step on the journey.

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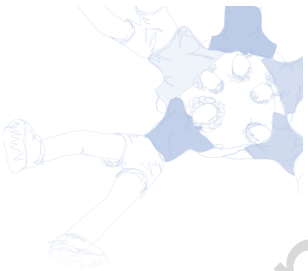


Making Classroom Assessment Work

Chapter 1

Contents

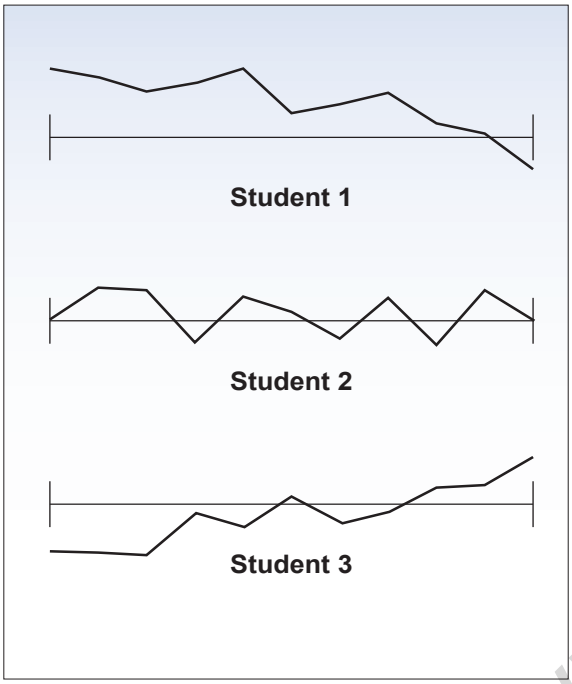
"An event is not an experience until you reflect upon it."

Michael Fullan

An important first step for making classroom assessment work is to understand the difference between assessment and evaluation. The terms *assessment* and *evaluation* are often used interchangeably, but they have different meanings. When we assess, we are gathering information about student learning that informs our teaching and helps students learn more. We may teach differently, based on what we find as we assess. When we evaluate, we decide whether or not students have learned what they needed to learn and how well they have learned it. Evaluation is a process of reviewing the evidence and determining its value. To illustrate the difference, the following scenario was originally developed by Michael Burger:

> Three students are taking a course in how to pack a parachute. Imagine that the class average is represented by a dotted line. Student Number One initially scored very high, but his scores have dropped as the end of the course approaches. Student Number Two's evaluations are erratic. Sometimes he does very well and sometimes he doesn't. The teacher has a hard time predicting from day to day how he will do. Student Number Three did very poorly in relation to the class for the first two-thirds of the course, but has lately figured out how to successfully pack a parachute.

Which of these students would you want to pack your parachute? Number One? Number Two? Number Three? Most people would



choose Number Three. The problem is that Number Three did not pass the course. When his grades were tallied and averaged, they weren't high enough. Number One and Number Two did pass.

Think about it. When should we assess, and when should we evaluate? What might be the results of evaluating too early or too much? How do we know if we are evaluating the right things? How do we know what makes sense for the learner and for the course?

When students are acquiring new skills, knowledge and understanding, they need a chance to practise. This is the learning process. Assessment *for* learning involves:

- checking to see what has been learned and what needs to be learned next
- accessing specific and descriptive feedback in relation to criteria that is focused on improvement
- involvement by the student in assessment – the person most able to improve the learning

Assessment *for* learning is used to collect information that will inform the teacher's next teaching steps and the student's next learning steps.

Assessment *for* learning involves learners receiving a considerable amount of *descriptive* feedback during their learning. Descriptive feedback gives information that enables the learner to adjust what he or she is doing in order to improve (Gibbs and Stobart, 1993; Hattie, 1992, 2005). Descriptive feedback comes from many sources, such as teachers, peers and the students themselves, as they compare their work to samples and related criteria. Feedback may take the form of specific comments about the work, information such as posted criteria that describe quality, or models and exemplars that show what quality can look like.

Evaluative feedback is different. It tells the learner how she or he has performed as compared to others or to some standard. When we evaluate, we consider the evidence and decide whether or not students have learned what was needed, and how well they have learned it. Evaluative feedback is often reported using grades, numbers, ticks or other symbols – it is encoded. Evaluation and evaluative feedback are often described as assessment *of* learning.

Research Connection:

Involving students in assessment and increasing the amount of descriptive feedback, while decreasing evaluative feedback, increases student learning significantly. While all students show gains, students who usually achieve the least show the largest gains overall. (Black and Wiliam, 1998)

Classroom teachers know, and research confirms, that if we evaluate too early, we limit descriptive feedback and risk interrupting the learning. When we assess during the learning and evaluate at the end of the learning, we give students time to practise and improve before we judge the evidence.

When engaged in assessment *of* learning, teachers and others are checking to see what has been learned to date. The evaluation that results is often summarised into scores or grades. Sometimes the evaluation is presented in such a way that the student's learning is compared with either that of other students or the year-level expectations. At the classroom level, assessment *of* learning information is used to communicate progress toward standards to students, parents and other educators. At the school, area or system level, it is used in a variety of ways to support student learning by helping the school, area or system learn.

Using samples to inform professional judgment

Collections that illustrate standards can be developed by working with colleagues to gather and analyse samples that illustrate quality. Teachers collect different samples depending on the standards toward which they teach, their year level and their students' needs. Examining student work in comparison to criteria has been shown to improve teachers' professional judgment (ARG, 2006).

Here are some more ways teachers have used samples to support classroom assessment:

Ms M used samples of student writing (drawings, letters, groups of letters, words) to help her prep students understand writing development. The first sample was one every child in the class could produce easily. The second sample was a little further along the continuum. Every few days, Ms M brought in another sample. When she introduced each one, she asked the students what the sample showed about quality writing. Together they made a verbal list. Then she asked what the writer could have done to improve each writing sample. Students used this work to guide their learning as well as their self-assessment. Ms M used it to point out ideas to students and demonstrate ways they could improve their own writing.

Ms J decided that one way to illustrate standards for reading in year two was to put together a collection of book titles and authors to show the range of what students at this level read. She based her collection on her own experience and suggestions from colleagues. She posted the list on the school website so parents could refer to it from time to time, as their child progressed.

Mr V gathered work from his year-four students and from colleagues to make files of six to ten samples, showing the range of writing that children of this age can produce, in each of the following three general categories:

- personal experience
- narratives
- communicating information

Collecting and Analysing Samples

Teachers can collect samples by themselves over time, but it is easier and more powerful if done with colleagues. The process of analysing and selecting samples gives teachers the chance to see a broad range of student work, understand what students are to know, develop a commonly held sense of what the learning might look like for students over time and begin to develop a common language to use. Here is one process you could follow:

1. Find some interested and willing colleagues.
2. Choose a focus for your investigation (e.g. journal writing).
3. Collect a range of samples. (Ensure that they are anonymous.)
4. Analyse what is working and what the next teaching steps could be for each sample. (Compare your student samples to exemplars provided by the relevant assessments, if available.)
5. Build a personal collection.
6. Choose another focus and repeat the cycle.

Ways to Come to Common Agreement About Quality

Purpose: To engage all participants and resource people in discussing and determining quality year-level work.

Prior to the Conversation: The professional learning team identifies an area of quality work upon which to focus. Each participant brings two or three samples of student work, of which at least one is determined to be "at year level". All student names are removed or covered, and work is labelled with a number such as 1, 2 or 3. Copies of the work are made for everyone. If student work is lengthy, the work and the focus question may be given ahead of time. The presenting educator identifies a focus question for the feedback–Would you agree this is "at year level" work? The presenting educator completes a written assessment before beginning the critique (see Preparatory Self-Assessment below) and prepares a five-minute overview of the work.

Time needed: 30–35 minutes for each review.

1. **Getting Started:** Select a facilitator and a timekeeper. Review the purpose of the protocol and ground rules for this process.
2. **Describing the Context:** The presenting teacher offers any background information and the purpose for the assessment. The focus question is written on poster paper or the board for all to see.
3. **Seeking Understanding:** Three reviewers ask questions to clarify. (3 minutes)
4. **Reviewing the Work:** Group members review the work. They discuss where the work is of quality in terms of the criteria used by students, what could improve the work, and possible next learning and teaching steps for each student. (8 minutes)
5. **Extending the Connections:** The presenting teacher joins the conversation and directs it to any intriguing ideas or points to pursue. (3 minutes)
6. **Summarising the Ideas:** Each participant has a last word to sum up the conversation. (5 minutes)
7. **Reflecting on the Conversation:** Presenter(s) of the work and reviewers comment briefly on the effectiveness of the protocol. (3 minutes)
8. **Continuing the Learning:** Repeat for each work presented.

Preparatory Self-Assessment:

- The learning purpose that students were given for this work was:
- The learning context for this work was:
- The criteria for success for this work was:
- I assess these samples as being of year-level quality because . . .
- In order to improve the quality of these samples, students would need to show evidence or be able to do . . .
- I think the next learning steps for these students are . . .

Adapted with permission from Glaude, *Protocols for Professional Learning Conversations*, 2011

Mathematics

Mrs J's description for success guides her teaching and classroom assessment. She has a growing collection of work samples to show quality. The samples and the description are used to help students understand success, to assign grades for reports and to document student learning as part of the school's local assessment. Early in the term, she shares the learning goals and with the students, brainstorms a list of possible evidence or proof of their learning. Periodically, she has them identify the current best pieces of evidence. Prior to the reports, she meets briefly with students to review their strengths and areas needing improvement, and to set goals. The ongoing evidence of learning includes:

Year 7 - Learning Results	Description of Success	Evidence of Learning
Students will: Understand and demonstrate a sense of what numbers mean and how they are used. Understand that mathematics is the science of patterns, relationships and functions. Understand and demonstrate computation and measurement skills. Understand and apply concepts from geometry and algebra. Understand and apply concepts in discrete mathematics and mathematical reasoning (problem solving). Reflect upon and clarify their understanding of mathematical ideas and relationships.	**Students can:** Create and interpret bar and line graphs including collections of raw data. Name, create and find the area and circumference of a variety of geometric shapes. Calculate mean, median, mode and range data. Calculate percentages, decimals and fractions. Use exponents and scientific notation. Understand basic units of measure in the metric system. Solve a basic 3 step equation. Write and solve word problems. Use a number line to calculate negative numbers. Read and use a protractor and compass.	**Evidence includes:** Notebooks Projects Tests Quizzes Geometry projects Graphs and charts Data analysis project Completed word problems Work sheets Maths journals Constructed responses Emails Website collection Inspiration web

- *Observations* – notes, interviews, checklists and records (e.g. work completion, practice work and homework)
- *Products* – maths notebooks, papers, projects, performance tasks, quizzes, revisions, pre- and post-tests, and yearly pre-assessment
- *Conversations* – small and large group conversations, homework debriefings, board work, peer tutoring and self-assessment in relation to criteria

The evidence of learning used for the local assessment includes two performance tasks, student self-assessment in relation to criteria, as well as a comparison to student work completed during the school year.