



# Introduction

*Focused Assessment: Enriching the Instructional Cycle* uses a research-based design that promotes an ongoing “check for understanding” throughout the learning process. The focused assessment model teaches the use of purposeful and relevant assessment, from preassessment to the completion of a final student product. It involves students in the process of gaining a clear understanding of their skill and knowledge proficiency and takes into account different learning styles, so that students may demonstrate evidence of competence in ways that make sense to them. Lastly, focused assessment is a consistent reflection of content standards—the objectives that were actually taught—and student data.

*Focused Assessment* involves a systematic process that embraces the concept of “assessment for learning.” It provides customizations that enable all learners to demonstrate proficiency according to their readiness level.

## **Why Should We “Focus Our Assessments”?**

The primary reason to assess student learning should be to *improve* student learning and teacher effectiveness. Thus, as we will keep emphasizing, assessment must be an ongoing process used throughout the learning cycle. It should be a purposeful and natural process that happens in conjunction with instruction, one that focuses attention on the refinements or revisions needed in the instruction. Let’s take a look at how focused assessment works in Lisa Schmidtgall’s seventh-grade classroom.

# 1

## Valuing the Continuous Learning Cycle

*Just as a finished architectural blueprint must contain everything needed to guide the actual construction of a building (including plumbing, electrical, door-and-window scheme, and so on), it is necessary to first design the “big picture” blueprint of a comprehensive instruction and assessment model.*

—Larry B. Ainsworth and Donald J. Viegut

In this chapter . . .

- Thinking About Assessment
- A Continuous Cycle of Teaching and Assessing
- Student Involvement in Assessment
- The Language of Assessment
- Thinking About Your Thinking
- Tools and Templates

### **Thinking About Assessment**

Reflect upon the types of assessment that your students are often asked to complete. Which of them are scored and graded, and which are used to simply inform? How often do you assess your students throughout a lesson? What formats do you use? Do all your students receive the same assessment?

### **A Continuous Cycle of Teaching and Assessing**

The continuous learning cycle may help to answer some of the above questions. We have broken the continuous learning cycle into the following four components.

### Tool 1: Terminology Grid

As you read each term and definition, reflect on your own background knowledge and experiences to enhance your understanding of the term. First, share your thinking in the center box. Then, in the box on the right, create a symbol or other visual reminder that will help you to embed the term into your long-term memory.

WORD AND DEFINITION	YOUR THOUGHTS OR EXPERIENCES	YOUR VISUAL REMINDER
<p><b>Content Standard:</b> What students need to know and be able to do in various content areas such as mathematics, reading, writing, science, social studies, fine arts, comprehensive health, technology, foreign language, and workplace skills. Content standards may also be referred to as targets, benchmarks, performance objectives, outcomes, or goals.</p>		
<p><b>Formative Assessment:</b> An ongoing process throughout the learning cycle to determine student understanding and teacher effectiveness. It should be a purposeful and natural process that coincides with instruction.</p>		
<p><b>Preassessment:</b> Tools or activities used to measure student mastery of goals or standards prior to the instruction</p>		
<p><b>Informal Assessment:</b> Tools or activities used to measure student progress and teacher effectiveness. These assessments are not used for grades, as students are not expected to have mastered goals at this point.</p>		

(continued)

# 2

## Laying the Groundwork

*Educational improvement must begin with a clear idea of what students are expected to learn. This premise underlies the standards-based efforts to improve American education.*

—Robert L. Linn and Norman E. Gronlund

In this chapter . . .

- Thinking About Assessment
- Reviewing Prior Data
- Analyzing the Standard
- Teaching the Vocabulary of the Standard
- Thinking About Your Thinking
- Tools and Templates

### **Thinking About Assessment**

As you consider moving to a focused assessment approach, ask yourself the following questions: Who will be involved in creating and implementing assessments? Will your grade-level team work collaboratively? How involved will students be?

### **Reviewing Prior Data**

In the standards-driven system in which we are now teaching, each educator is responsible for an abundance of standards and goals. The task of deciding how much time to spend teaching and assessing each one can be daunting, to say the least.

# 4

## Choosing From a Variety of Formats

*Standards can be raised only by changes that are put into direct effect by teachers and pupils in classrooms. There is a body of firm evidence that formative assessment is an essential component of classroom work and that its development can raise standards of achievement. We know of no other way of raising standards for which such a strong prima facie case can be made.*

—Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam

In this chapter . . .

- Thinking About Assessment
- Which Designs Are Most Appropriate?
- Summative Assessment
- Thinking About Your Thinking
- Tools and Templates

### **Thinking About Assessment**

Ponder these questions: What do you believe are the most powerful factors that influence student success, and what role does formative assessment play? Which kinds of assessments involve active engagement from the learner, and which do you feel cause deeper learning? Which formats allow you to customize expectations for diverse learners?