Assessment Primer

2010-2011
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Assessment Basics

Who: all of your students: weak, strong, strugglers, high achievers

What: outcomes, via everything that they do, say, create, show, understand, interpret, etc.

Where: in class, online, via journals, blogs, etc.

When: during class, at home, etc.

Why: to support or change teaching to support and encourage learning and to inform the parents and students of the progress and abilities of the student.

How: in many different, varied and differentiated ways
What is Assessment?

Assessment is the systematic collection, review, and use of information about educational programs undertaken for the purpose of improving student learning and development. (Palomba & Banta, 1999). It is a method for analyzing and describing student learning outcomes or program achievement of objectives. Many assessments are not tests. For students, a reading miscue analysis is an assessment, a direct observation of student behavior can be an assessment, and a student conference can be an assessment. For programs, an interview can be an assessment, and good assessment requires feedback to those who are being assessed so that they can use that information to make improvements.

Assessment focuses on learning, teaching and outcomes. It provides information to improve learning and teaching. Assessment is an interactive process between students and faculty that informs faculty how well their students are learning what they are teaching. The information is used by faculty to make changes in the learning environment, and is shared with students to assist them in improving their learning and study habits.

A good assessment program requires using a variety of assessment instruments each one designed to discover unique aspects of student learning outcomes and achievement of program objectives.

Assessment is an ongoing process aimed at understanding and improving student learning. It involves making our expectations explicit and public; setting appropriate criteria and standards for learning quality; systematically gathering, analyzing, and interpreting evidence to determine how well performance matches those expectations and standards; and using the resulting information to document, explain, and improve performance. (Angelo, 1995)
What is the difference between Assessment and Evaluation?

**Evaluation** is the process of analyzing, reflecting upon, and summarizing assessment information, and or making judgments and/or decisions based on the information collected. **Evaluation** focuses on grades and may reflect classroom components other than course content and mastery level. These could include discussion, cooperation, attendance, and verbal ability. This usually involves a summative assessment and is recorded as a mark or grade.

**Assessment** is reviewing, collecting, and is generally more **formative**. It affects change in teaching practice. It focuses more on student learning and opportunities for practice.

What is the Difference between Formative and Summative Assessment?

**Formative** assessment, often referred to as assessment **for** learning, is the assessment that is done before and during teaching to inform instruction. Formative assessment includes things like teacher–student conferences, listening in on student book discussions, taking records of children’s oral reading, examining students’ writing pieces, and so forth. Though these assessments might be standardized, they often are not. To be **formative**, an assessment **must affect instruction**. It is the gathering of information about student learning during the progression of a course or program and usually repeatedly, to improve the learning of those students. Example: reading the first lab reports of a class to assess whether some or all students in the group need a lesson on how to make them succinct and informative. (Leskes, 2002)

**Summative assessment**, often referred to as assessment **of** learning, is the after-the-fact assessment in which we look back at what students have learned, such as end-of-course or end-of-year examinations. The most familiar forms are the end-of-year standardized tests, though in classrooms we also assess students’ learning at the end of a unit. These assessments are likely to be uniform or standardized. The **purpose of summative assessment is to create a mark or grade**.
What Are the Big Ideas About Assessment?

Adapted from the work of Damian Cooper, they are:

- Assessment serves different purposes at different times.
- Assessment must be planned, purposeful and accurate.
- Assessment must be balanced, inclusive and flexible.
- Assessment and instruction are inseparable.
- For assessment to be helpful to students it must consist of descriptive feedback.
- Assessment is a collaborative process that is most effective when many parties are involved.
- Performance standards are an essential component of effective assessment.
- Grading and reporting student achievement is a responsive process that requires teachers to exercise their professional judgment.
What does this mean to teachers?

- Assessment is sometimes to inform teaching/instruction and sometimes to communicate information about achievement.

- Assessment must be aligned with curriculum, instruction, grading and reporting. Three big questions to consider here: What are my expectations? How will I know the students have met them? What am I going to do/teach to make it happen?

- Assessment must include: oral, performance and written task. It must be flexible in order to improve learning for all students. You may need to adapt or modify for assessment for particular students or situations.

- The information that you, as the teacher, gather from listening, observing and conferring with your students allows you to adjust your teaching. Analyzing results of tests or projects show areas needing attention in instruction.

- Marks and letter grades do not provide students with the information that they need to improve their work. Students need clear and specific information on what to do to improve the quality of their work. Descriptive feedback will provide students with the information they need to improve.

- Students, teachers and parents should all be involved in the process of assessment. Peer assessment, work portfolios and three way conferences with parents, all maximize the potential to improve student learning. As Cooper says “Assessment is not something teachers do to students; it is a collaborative process...”

- Conversations and observations provide valid assessment data, when supported by appropriate diagnostic tools. (Rubrics, checklists, etc.)

- The grade on a report card should never come as a surprise to parents or students. It should be reflective of what has been happening and discussed.
FIVE KEYS TO QUALITY ASSESSMENT*

- **What?**
  Clear and appropriate learning targets

- **Why?**
  Clearly focused and appropriate purpose

- **How?**
  Appropriate match among targets, purposes, and method of assessment

- **How Much?**
  Sufficient sampling of student work to make sound inferences about learning

- **How Accurate?**
  Fairness and freedom from biases that distort the picture of learning

Backwards Design

The Backward Design Model taken from the work of Wiggins and McTighe

The backwards design model centers on the idea that the design process should begin with identifying the desired results and then "work backwards" to develop instruction rather than the traditional approach which is to define what topics need to be covered. Their framework identifies three main stages:

- **Stage 1**: Identify desired outcomes and results.

- **Stage 2**: Determine what constitutes acceptable evidence of competency in the outcomes and results (assessment).

- **Stage 3**: Plan instructional strategies and learning experiences that bring students to these competency levels.

Note: Outcome not standard for Nova Scotian Schools
In book Information

See page 36-38 in Damian Cooper’s Talk About Assessment for a good example of how this works.

Websites

These sites have some very good information in an easy to read format.


http://www.flec.ednet.ns.ca/staff/What%20is%20Backward%20Design%20etc.pdf

Feedback – The Most Powerful Tool

Feedback provides information to students and teachers about learning. It helps to reduce the gap between the student’s current level of understanding and/or performance and a desired goal. Depending on the nature and delivery of the feedback, it can have powerful positive effects on student learning and engagement. (Hattie & Timperley, 2007)

Feedback is an essential practice of assessment for learning, “a process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners and their teachers to decide where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go, and how best to get there” (Assessment Reform Group, 2002). A substantial body of research identifies assessment for learning as a powerful tool for improving students’ learning (Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall & Wiliam, 2003).

Assessment for learning differs from assessment of learning in that the information gathered is used for the specific purpose of helping students improve while they are still gaining knowledge and practising skills. Teachers who view assessment as integral to learning engage students as collaborative partners in the learning process. This assessment provides precise and timely information so teachers can adjust instruction in response to individual student needs, and so students can adjust their learning strategies or set different goals.
**Descriptive Feedback**

It is **specific information** in the form of **written comments or conversations** that **help the learner understand** what he or she needs to do in order **to improve**.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluative Feedback</th>
<th>Descriptive Feedback</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>96% or 49%</td>
<td>You supported your answers with great details or you did not provide enough evidence to support your answers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You keep making the same mistake</td>
<td>You need to always use upper case letters at the start of a sentence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good job!</td>
<td>You have all of the necessary criteria in your paper and you have great ideas expressed in a concise manner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Try harder next time.</td>
<td>You didn’t maintain eye contact with the audience throughout your entire speech.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sites for Descriptive Feedback**

http://www.curriculum.org/secretariat/inquiring/feedback.shtml

http://www.learnalberta.ca/content/ssass/html/feedbackexamples.html

These are great sites for information on feedback in general


Anne Davies COP Assessment Triangulation

- Conversations: using rubrics and or checklists to record the information learned from students
- Observations: using rubrics and checklist to verify your observations and to record student behavior and or achievement of outcomes
- Products: This is what we are most comfortable using to show whether or not our students have met the outcomes, but they are one-dimensional and we need to include the other forms of assessment for a balanced grade.

**Triangulation**: A process of combining methodologies to strengthen the reliability of a design approach; when applied to alternative assessment, triangulation refers to the collection and comparison of data or information from three difference sources or perspectives. (COP for example conversations, observations and products)

**Observation**
- Watching students and using checklists to record information that will be considered, when grading students’ achievement of outcomes

**Conversation**
- Talking to students to assess their understanding / comprehension and/or to detect areas of concern and recording this information for formative or summative purposes

**Product**
- Projects, presentations, demonstrations, tests, quizzes, dances, songs etc. that can be used to assess the achievement of outcomes
Co-Created Criteria from the work of Anne Davies

- Criteria are the standards by which learning will be judged
- Criteria can be set for or with students, but it is a way to have students “buy into” what you are doing
- Criteria should be established prior to beginning an assignment

**Criteria:** Guidelines, rules, characteristics, or dimensions that are used to judge the quality of student performance. Criteria indicate what we value in student responses, products or performances. They may be holistic, analytic, general, or specific. Scoring rubrics are based on criteria and define what the criteria mean and how they are used.

Four Steps to Co creating Criteria

**Step 1: Brainstorm**
Ask students, “What counts in an inquiry project?” or “What counts in the retrieving phase

**Step 2: Sort and categorize.**
Teachers ask students to help sort the list they generated together into relevant categories related to the Inquiry process.

**Step 3: Make and post a T-chart**
The t-chart should include criteria on one side and details about that criterion on the other side.
Teachers should ensure that all students understand criteria and should add details to those that may need clarification.

**Step 4: Add, Revise, refine.**
It is important that the criteria be visible and organic. Students must be able to see, use and suggest revisions at all times. This can take place while work is being done on the assignment.

**Book reference**

*Making Classroom Assessment Work by Anne Davies*

**Website References**

www.annedavies.com

www.connect2learning.com

**Rubrics**

By using rubrics you are sharing with the students what your expectations are and you are providing them with a roadmap to success.

Rubrics are also your best defense when being questioned about the validity of a grade. You have solid evidence to support the score or grade given.

Sample rubrics are available from a variety of sources. The internet has numerous rubrics to choose from, as well as sites where you can create your own rubrics.

Remember that the rubrics should be used to assess student achievement of the learning outcomes and not just content in a given subject area.

**Here are some suggested sites to help you.**


http://school.discoveryeducation.com/schrockguide/assess.html

www.readwritethink.org
Checklists

Checklists are often used for observing performance in order to keep track of a student's progress or work over time. They can also be used to determine whether students have met established criteria on a task.

To construct a checklist, identify the different parts of a specific communication task and any other requirements associated with it. Create a list of these with columns for marking yes and no. 

See Appendices for more in depth information

Assessing Outcomes not Content

Traditionally teachers have been assessing student knowledge of content that has been taught and while this has sometimes touched on the specific curriculum outcomes, it has not always been the focus. In some subject areas, like math for an example, the content can be the outcome. In English Language Arts the outcomes are more skill and process related and the content is only the vehicle to teach and assess the outcomes. Therefore, when preparing to teach and assess, the focus should be only on the outcomes and whether or not students are achieving them.
Ken O'Connor's 15 Fixes - Grading for Learning

Fix 1: Separating Achievement from Behavior

Fix 2: How to Handle Late Work

Fix 3: How to Avoid Inflated Grades

Fix 4: How to Handle Academic Dishonesty

Fix 5: Separating Attendance from Achievement

Fix 6: How to Handle Group Work

Fix 7: Using Standards as the Basis for Assessment

Fix 8: How to Measure Proficiency

Fix 9: Using Criterion Referencing

Fix 10: Quality Assessment

Fix 11: How Grades are Determined

Fix 12: Avoiding the Zero

Fix 13: Formative and Summative Assessment

Fix 14: Learning over Time

Fix 15: Student Involvement and Understanding of Assessment and Grading

Please see the link below to connect to short video clips on each of these topics

http://powerschool.com/products/powerteacher/ken/fix15/ (Video)
Glossary of Terms

Assessment

Is reviewing, collecting, and is generally more formative. It affects change in teaching practice. It focuses more on student learning and opportunities for practice.

Assessment Events

Assessment might require students to answer an open-ended question, work out a solution to a problem, perform a demonstration of a skill, or in some way produce work rather than select an answer from choices on a sheet of paper. Portfolios and instructor observation of students are also forms of assessment events.

Backwards by Design

The backwards design model centers on the idea that the design process should begin with identifying the desired results and then "work backwards" to develop instruction. This is done this way rather than the traditional approach which is to define what topics need to be covered. Their framework identifies three main stages: **Identifying** outcomes and results, **determining** what is acceptable evidence of competency and **planning** instruction and experience to help students achieve the outcomes.

Benchmark

Levels of academic performance used as checkpoints to monitor progress toward performance goals and/or academic standards.

Checklist

A listing of points or information/criteria that can be used to evaluate the proficiency/achievement of a skill.

Conferring

Is consulting together, comparing opinions, or carrying on a conversation. Conferences with students are purposeful conversations that scaffold learning strategies that guide the learner’s progress.
Evaluation

Is the process of analyzing, reflecting upon, and summarizing assessment information, and or making judgments and/or decisions based on the information collected. Evaluation focuses on grades and may reflect classroom components other than course content and mastery level. These could include discussion, cooperation, attendance, and verbal ability. This usually involves a summative assessment and is recorded as a mark or grade.

Formative Assessment

Is a process used by teachers and students as part of instruction that provides feedback to adjust ongoing teaching and learning to improve students’ achievement of core content. As assessment for learning, formative assessment practices provide students with clear learning targets, examples and models of strong and weak work, regular descriptive feedback, and the ability to self-assess, track learning, and set goals. (Adapted from Council of Chief State School Officers, FAST SCASS)

http://www.iowa.gov/educate/content/view/1043/1170/

Mean

Is one of several ways of representing a group with a single, typical score. It is figured by adding up all the individual scores in a group and dividing them by the number of people in the group. The mean can be affected by extremely low or high scores.

Median

Is the point on a scale that divides a group into two equal subgroups. It is another way to represent a group's scores with a single, typical score. The median is not affected by low or high scores as is the mean. (See Norm.)

Mode

Is the score or value that occurs most often in a distribution.

Norm

A distribution of scores obtained from a norm group. The norm is the midpoint (or median) of scores or performance of the students in that group. Fifty percent will score above and fifty percent below the norm.
Peer Assessment

Is when fellow students, using valid criteria, provide support and suggestions to improve or assess work or assessment events.

Performance Assessment

Is the process of using student activities or products, as opposed to tests or surveys, to evaluate students’ knowledge, skills, and development. Methods include: essays, oral presentations, exhibitions, performances, and demonstrations. Examples include: reflective journals (daily/weekly); capstone experiences; demonstrations of student work (e.g. acting in a theatrical production, playing an instrument, observing a student teaching a lesson); products of student work (e.g. Art students produce paintings/drawings, Journalism students write newspaper articles, Geography students create maps, Computer Science students generate computer programs, etc.)

Portfolio

A systematic and organized collection of a student's work that exhibits to others the direct evidence of a student's efforts, achievements, and progress over a period of time. The collection should involve the student in selection of its contents, and should include information about the performance criteria, the rubric or criteria for judging merit, and evidence of student self-reflection or evaluation. It should include representative work, providing a documentation of the learner's performance and a basis for evaluation of the student's progress. Portfolios may include a variety of demonstrations of learning and have been gathered in the form of a physical collection of materials, videos, CD-ROMs, reflective journals, etc.

Rubrics:

Specific sets of criteria that clearly define for both student and teacher what a range of acceptable and unacceptable performance looks like. Criteria define descriptors of ability at each level of performance and assign values to each level. Levels referred to are proficiency levels which describe a continuum from excellent to unacceptable product.

Summative Assessments

Are typically used to evaluate the effectiveness of instructional programs and services at the end of an academic year or at a pre-determined time. The goal of summative assessments is to make a judgment of student competency after an instructional phase is complete. Summative evaluations are used to determine if students have mastered specific competencies and to identify instructional areas that need additional attention.
Links and Resources

Making Classroom Assessment Work
(2nd Edition)
Author: Anne Davies

Knowing What Counts
Series
Authors: Kathleen Gregory, Caren Cameron, and Anne Davies
TheKnowing What Counts Series includes three books on key assessment for learning practices: Setting and Using Criteria, Self-Assessment and Goal-Setting, and Conferencing and Reporting.

www.connect2learning.com

http://www.damiancooperassessment.com/contact.html

http://www.oconnorgrading.com/

http://www.specialconnections.ku.edu/cgi-bin/cgiwrap/specconn/main.php?cat=instruction&section=main&subsection=udl/portfolio

folio
Appendices

- Checklist Creation
- Assessment Strategies
- Assessing Student Learning in the Classroom
- Creating strong Report Card Comments
- Feedback
Checklists

GUIDELINES FOR DEVELOPING EVALUATION CHECKLISTS: THE CHECKLISTS DEVELOPMENT CHECKLIST (CDC)

http://www.wmich.edu/evalctr/archive_checklists/guidelines.htm

Daniel L. Stufflebeam

Checklists are valuable evaluation devices when carefully developed, validated, and applied. A sound evaluation checklist clarifies the criteria that at least should be considered when evaluating something in a particular area; aids the evaluator not to forget important criteria; and enhances the assessment's objectivity, credibility, and reproducibility. Moreover, such a checklist is useful in planning an enterprise, monitoring and guiding its operation, and assessing its outcomes. In the evaluation vernacular, checklists are useful for both formative and summative evaluations.

CHECKLISTS DEVELOPMENT CHECKLIST (CDC)

1. Focus the checklist task

- Define the content area of interest
- Define the checklist's intended uses
- Reflect on and draw upon pertinent training and experience
- Study the relevant literature
- Engage and have conversations with experts in the content area

- Clarify and justify the criteria to be met by the checklist (e.g., pertinence, comprehensiveness, clarity, concreteness, ease of use, parsimony, applicability to the full range of intended uses, and fairness)
2. Make a candidate list of checkpoints

- List descriptors for well-established criteria of merit
- Briefly define each of the initial checkpoints
- Add descriptors for checkpoints needed to round out a definition of merit for the content area
- Provide definitions for each of the added descriptors

3. Classify and sort the checkpoints

- Write each descriptor and definition on a separate 4" x 6" card
- Sort the cards in search of categories
- Identify the main candidate categories and label each category

4. Define and flesh out the categories

- Define each category and its key concepts and terms
- Write a rationale for each category
- Present relevant warnings about being overzealous in applying the checkpoint
- Review the checkpoints in each category for inclusiveness, clarity, and parsimony
- Add, subtract, and rewrite checkpoints as appropriate

5. Determine the order of categories

- Decide if order is an important consideration regarding the intended uses of the checklist
- If so, write a rationale for the preferred order
- Provide an ordering of the categories
6. Obtain initial reviews of the checklist

- Prepare a review version of the checklist
- Engage potential users to review and critique the checklist
- Interview the critics to gain an in-depth understanding of their concerns and suggestions
- List the issues in need of attention

7. Revise the checklist content

- Examine and decide how to address the identified issues
- Rewrite the checklist content

8. Delineate and format the checklist to serve the intended uses

- Determine with potential users whether category and/or total scores are needed or desired
- Determine with users what needs exist regarding differential weighting of categories and/or individual checkpoints
- Determine with users any checkpoints or categories of checkpoints that must be passed for a satisfactory score on the overall checklist
- Determine with users what needs exist regarding profiling of checklist results
- Format the checklist based on the above determinations

9. Evaluate the checklist

- Obtain reviews of the checklist from intended users and relevant experts
- Engage intended users to field-test the checklist
- Generally, assess whether the checklist meets the requirements of pertinence, comprehensiveness, clarity, applicability to the full range of intended uses, concreteness, parsimony, ease of use, and fairness
10. Finalize the checklist
- Systematically consider and address the review and field-test findings
- Print the finalized checklist

11. Apply and disseminate the checklist
- Apply the checklist to its intended use
- Make the checklist available via such means as journals, professional papers, web pages, etc.
- Invite users to provide feedback to the developer

12. Periodically review and revise the checklist
- Use all available feedback to review and improve the checklist at appropriate intervals
# Assessment Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classroom presentations</td>
<td>A classroom presentation is an assessment strategy that requires students to verbalize their knowledge, select and present samples of finished work, and organize their thoughts about a topic in order to present a summary of their learning. It may provide the basis for assessment upon completion of a student's project or essay.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conferences</td>
<td>A conference is a formal or informal meeting between the teacher and a student for the purpose of exchanging information or sharing ideas. A conference might be held to explore the student's thinking and suggest next steps; assess the student's level of understanding of a particular concept or procedure; and review, clarify, and extend what the student has already completed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Essays</td>
<td>An essay is a writing sample in which a student constructs a response to a question, topic, or brief statement, and supplies supporting details or arguments. The essay allows the teacher to assess the student's understanding and/or ability to analyze and synthesize information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibitions/Demonstrations</td>
<td>An exhibition/demonstration is a performance in a public setting, during which a student explains and applies a process, procedure, etc., in concrete ways to show individual achievement of specific skills and knowledge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>An interview is a face-to-face conversation in which teacher and student use inquiry to share their knowledge and understanding of a concept or problem, and can be used by the teacher to explore the student's thinking; assess the student's level of understanding of a concept or procedure; and gather information, obtain clarification, determine positions, and probe for motivations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning logs</td>
<td>A learning log is an ongoing, visible record kept by a student and recording what he or she is doing or thinking while working on a particular task or assignment. It can be used to assess student progress and growth over time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation</td>
<td>Observation is a process of systematically viewing and recording students while they work, for the purpose of making programming and instruction decisions. Observation can take place at any time and in any setting. It provides information on students' strengths and weaknesses, learning styles, interests, and attitudes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance tasks</td>
<td>During a performance task, students create, produce, perform, or present works on &quot;real world&quot; issues. The performance task may be used to assess a skill or proficiency, and provides useful information on the process as well as the product.</td>
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### Assessment Strategies (continued)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Portfolios</strong></td>
<td>A portfolio is a collection of samples of a student’s work, and is focused, selective, reflective, and collaborative. It offers a visual demonstration of a student’s achievement, capabilities, strengths, weaknesses, knowledge, and specific skills, over time and in a variety of contexts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Questions and answers (oral)</strong></td>
<td>In the question–and-answer strategy, the teacher poses a question and the student answers verbally, rather than in writing. This strategy helps the teacher to determine whether students understand what is being, or has been, presented, and helps students to extend their thinking, generate ideas, or solve problems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quizzes, tests, examinations</strong></td>
<td>A quiz, test, or examination requires students to respond to prompts in order to demonstrate their knowledge (orally or in writing) or their skills (e.g., through performance). Quizzes are usually short; examinations are usually longer. Quizzes, tests, or examinations can be adapted for exceptional students and for reteaching and retesting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Response journals</strong></td>
<td>A response journal is a student’s personal record containing written, reflective responses to material he or she is reading, viewing, listening to, or discussing. The response journal can be used as an assessment tool in all subject areas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Selected responses</strong></td>
<td>Strictly speaking a part of quizzes, tests, and examinations, selected responses require students to identify the one correct answer. The strategy can take the form of multiple-choice or true-false formats. Selected response is a commonly used formal procedure for gathering objective evidence about student learning, specifically in memory, recall, and comprehension.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student self-assessments</strong></td>
<td>Self-assessment is a process by which the student gathers information about, and reflects on, his or her own learning. It is the student’s own assessment of personal progress in terms of knowledge, skills, processes, or attitudes. Self-assessment leads students to a greater awareness and understanding of themselves as learners.</td>
</tr>
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Definitions adapted from *The Ontario Curriculum Unit Planner; Assessment Strategies Companion*  
© Queen’s Printer for Ontario, 2002
Planning for Assessment FOR Learning

The key is not to prioritize what's on your schedule, but to schedule your priorities.

Covey (1989, 161)

Often when new strategies or skills are acquired they become "one more thing" to build into an already hectic school day. This might be how you are feeling about trying to incorporate the strategies that have been suggested in Go!6, but with a little planning, you will learn how to make effective choices about where to invest time and energy. This section provides details about helping you implement your plan for assessment for learning in your classroom.

Consider the following key visual from the AAC resource A Framework for Student Assessment 2nd edition (2005):

Assessing Student Learning in the Classroom

How will students demonstrate their learning?
- self/peer/pupil/norm/teacher as coach assessment for learning
- descriptive
- specific
- self/peer/pupil/norm/teacher as coach assessment for learning

What will be the next steps in learning?
- set criteria/indicators
- provide examples
- establish purpose and context
- create opportunities to demonstrate learning
- observations
- learning logs
- performance tasks
- projects
- tests
- written language
- oral language
- visual communication
- establish feedback strategies

The visual reminds us that the Program of Studies is the foundation of our work. Answering three key planning questions prior to teaching helps teachers make choices about how to invest their time:

1. What will students learn?
2. How will we know learning has occurred?
3. How will we collect and provide evidence of learning?

Once we determine what constitutes sufficient evidence of student achievement, we can turn our attention to the teaching and assessment for learning activities students need.

Refocus: Looking at Assessment for Learning
AAC ... everyday assessment tools for teachers
Creating Strong Report Card Comments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Try to...</th>
<th>Try Not to...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Maintain a focus on the child</td>
<td>• List what was taught</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Relate comments to the outcomes</td>
<td>• Include comments about attendance, homework, behaviour, attitude (this information can – and should – be included in the Learner Profile section of the report card)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Focus on what was learned/achieved</td>
<td>• Use teacher jargon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Use “parent friendly” language and maintain a focus on that audience – remind yourself of what you would like to read about your own child.</td>
<td>• Over-emphasize the negative (challenges)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Give examples to help clarify the broad statements</td>
<td>• Mix speaking to parents and students interchangeably by inserting comments such as “Good Job, Jason!”, or “Bravo!” etc. (These comments should be reserved for the additional space at the end of the report card.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Identify strengths, challenges</td>
<td>• State what will be the focus for the whole class instruction during the next term.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Connect next step(s) to the challenge(s) identified</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Throughout the report card, for each comment that is written, maintain a student-centred focus.

Keep these questions in mind:

Will a parent reading these comments
• understand clearly how his/her child is doing in your class/subject?
• understand that his/her child has areas of strength?
• know what is being done to address any areas of weakness? (This might also include ways the child can take some responsibility for his/her improvement and/or ways the family can support.)
• be aware of your interest in his/her child as an individual learner?

The report card comments should reflect the child’s achievement relative to the outcomes. Teachers should avoid a reiteration of the outcomes taught during the reporting period, but rather focus on the child’s experience with them.
RESEARCH ON THE EFFECTS OF FEEDBACK ON STUDENT LEARNING

A key premise is that for students to be able to improve, they must have the capacity to monitor the quality of their own work during actual production. This in turn requires that students:
- Know what high quality work looks like
- Be able to objectively compare their work to the standard
- Have a store of tactics to make work better based on their observations (Sadler, 1989)

Effective feedback points out successes and gives specific information about how to improve the performance or product. (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Black, et al, 2002; bloom, 1989; Brown, 1994)

Feedback is effective when it offers information about progress relative to the intended learning goal and about what action to take to reach the intended learning goal. (Hattie & Timperley, 2005)

Comments directed to the quality of the work—what was done well and what needs improving—increase student interest in the task and level of achievement. (Butler, 1988)

Research shows that feedback that emphasizes learning goals leads to greater learning gains than feedback that emphasizes self-esteem. (Ames, 1992; Butler, 1998; Dweck, 1986)

When receiving feedback emphasizing self-esteem, high-performing students often attribute their performance to effort and low-performing students attribute their performance to lack of ability. (Butler & Newman, 1995; Cameron & Pierce, 1994; Kluger & DeNisi, 1996)

Feedback that cues the individual to direct attention to self (praise, effort, etc.) rather than to the quality of the task appears to have a negative effect on learning. Many studies speak to effective teachers praising less than average. (Cameron/Pierce, 1994; Kluger & DiNisi, 1996)

Feedback is effective when it addresses partial understanding. When student work demonstrates lack of understanding, feedback will not help. (Hattie & Timperley, 2007)

Grading every piece of homework is misdirected. A numerical grade does not show students how to improve their work. Further, students ignore comments when grades are given. (Butler, 1998)

When teachers substituted comments for grades, students engaged more productively in improving their work. (Black, et al, 2002)

CONCLUSION

Effective feedback to improve learning:
1. Directs attention to the learning, pointing out strengths and offering specific information to guide improvement; aligns with the learning targets for an activity
2. Occurs during the learning process; gives an opportunity to get better before the grading event
3. Addresses partial understanding; not effective if the student knows nothing
4. Does not do the thinking for the student
5. Limits correctives to what a student can act on in a given amount of time

Judy Arter and Loren Ford, Anderson Conference, PCC, January 2011
Handout #5