

Assessing and Supporting Achievement Growth for ALL Students

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For this assignment, we were asked to write about our planned professional actions to assess and support “achievement growth for ALL students”.

Professional Action Plan

“Classroom assessment is a set of strategies, techniques, and procedures that teachers and students engage in to collect, evaluate, and report student achievement” (McMillan, 2015, p. 819). Assessment is used to measure understanding and give growth-oriented feedback aligned with the learning objectives. Results are applied in adjusting instructional actions to help all students achieve proficiency. Regularly assessing what we know and can do is an integral part of instruction and goes far beyond a simple test of knowledge followed by a grade. Evaluating our assessed understandings and abilities can show us how we are progressing in our learning journey and inform us of what we need to do next to achieve our goals; whether we are students, teachers, schools, districts, or states.

A modern, standards-based education model calls for continuous assessment to determine student understanding and adjust instruction to meet their needs. Many types of assessment are employed for this purpose, from large-scale standardized tests to quick in-class quizzes or questions to get instant feedback and make adjustments during a lesson. Students must also be able to assess their own work and progress in order to make necessary adjustments to their learning process and become self-regulated learners. In the words of Garrison and Ehringhaus “Assessment is information... the more information we have about students, the clearer the picture we have about achievement or where gaps may occur” (2013).

According to Wiggins (2002), an important part of the overall assessment “portfolio” is authentic tasks similar to what might be done in a workplace or at home, often called performance tasks, that can be graded using a standards derived rubric. Performance tasks are a kind of activity that can be used to assess student understanding and achievement of course standards in subjects that are not included in standardized tests or as a more "authentic" addendum to the regular testing regime. These kinds of assessed activities provide another important benefit in that they create an opportunity for students to self-reflect using the same grading rubric.

The self-reflection cycle can be supported through the use of worksheets and graphic organizers to help guide students through the process and develop good self-regulation practices. Utilizing worksheets designed for self-assessment, goal-setting, error-correction, and progress-tracking are supported by Romano et al (n.d.) who said that goal-setting is important for students, along with developing a plan for reaching the goals. Rubrics and worksheets help to enable this cycle of goal-setting and planning, while also aiding the student to become better self-regulated in their learning process. Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick (2006) explained that students who are self-regulated produce, interpret, and use feedback more effectively to reach their goals. They also wrote that students are able to become more self-regulated with the help of appropriate feedback. Marzano (2009) proclaimed large gains in achievement were seen simply by having students track their own progress. Progress tracking “can encourage students when they see an improvement as well as reinforce the link between their own efforts and their achievements” (Kinney, 2018)

“Educators must use frequent checks for understanding—as often as every 10-15 minutes” (Goodwin & Hubbell, 2013). In addition to periodic assessing with authentic tasks and utilizing standards-based tests to gather data, formative assessment should be used much more frequently during the learning process to get information about student understanding and allow for immediate instructional adjustments (Garrison & Ehringhaus, 2013). The cycle of effort, feedback, and instruction, should improve the student's competence leading up to the summative assessment. “The act of checking for understanding not only identifies errors and misconceptions but also can improve learning” (Fisher & Frey, 2014). There are many ways to check for understanding; from simple questions for the students during lecture, to quizzes and summaries. The method used will depend on the purpose and the setting. A variety of strategies should be employed to “assess student readiness... and plan instruction around the needs of students” (Regier, 2012). The “mastery learning” methodology, which is heavily dependent on regular formative assessment and feedback, has been shown to be among the most successful strategies for improving student achievement (Nabori, 2012).

Students aren't the only component of an educational program that requires assessing; the performance of teachers and schools along with their curricula must also be evaluated. MDK12.org (n.d.) explained that schools often continue interventions without evaluating their success, which can lead to wasted resources and time. They suggest a systematic method for evaluating interventions (and teachers) that starts with identifying the goals and the evidence of students having achieved proficiency, and ends with assessment data collection and analysis of the data. As they say “It is only by monitoring student progress that the teacher will have any information to use in planning appropriate instruction” (n.d.).

Data from standardized tests is often used for teacher and school accountability measures as well as more locally produced assessments for non-tested subjects. The key to interpreting the data in a way that provides the most utility for substantive evaluation is in using comparable data collected over time for individual students to measure growth. One tool that has been adopted for this purpose is called a Student Learning Objective (SLO). Correct use of SLOs has been shown by the University of Colorado Center for Assessment, Design, Research and Evaluation to be beneficial to student achievement (CADRE, n.d.)

Conclusion

Using rubrics to gauge student performance on standards-aligned tasks can provide good data on which to base instructional decisions. Moreover, the use of SA/GS, and EC worksheets can help students to engage in a self-reflection process to become better self-regulated and master the objectives, as well as for the instructor to identify issues and adjust instruction efforts to address misunderstandings. Formative assessment must be used constantly and consistently in a variety of ways to check for understanding and support mastery learning. Finally, teachers must also be self-reflective in their work, along with schools to “[use] data systematically to ask questions and obtain insight about student progress in a logical way to monitor continuous improvement and tailor instruction to the needs of each student” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014 referencing Hamilton et al, 2009). The authors also quoted Calman who said “Research has found that school effectiveness is strongly associated with the effective use of data at both the school and classroom levels.” (2010).

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