

Assessments for Learning: Innovative Ways to Check for Understanding

Transcript of Speakers

Module I. Selecting the Perfect Assessment for Every Circumstance

A. Using Quality Assessments to Become a Reflective Teacher

Introduction to Assessments for Learning

VOICEOVER: Welcome to Assessment for Learning: Innovative Ways to Check for Understanding. In this program you will deepen your understanding of formative assessments. You will be shown ways to quickly check for comprehension; and, even how to involve students in self-assessing. This empowers both the teachers and the students to take corrective steps in the learning process.

TEACHER: The difference between Assessment of Learning and Assessment for Learning; when you're teaching a child... it's like playing the piano, you practice many many time before a recital and you need to know where you are between those recitals before you can progress. So the Assessment for Learning is to detect where the children are so that you know what you need to teach at that time and then progress on.

VOICEOVER: You will hear from an array of national experts, including acclaimed author Rick Stiggins. Dr Stiggins will guide you through the process of selecting just the right assessment for each situation

RICK STIGGINS: To begin with, if we're going to assess things in a variety of ways, we need to understand that those assessments need to be of high quality. Sometimes we want kids to master content knowledge, where master includes both know and understand. Other times, we want kids to be able to use that knowledge to reason and solve problems. Still other times, we want kids to demonstrate performance skills, where it's the doing that's important, like giving a speech or speaking a second language proficiently.

VOICEOVER: Finally, we will look at the importance of using formal data to help educators assess their own teaching as well as identifying students who are consistently falling behind.

MARY DULWORTH: I can't expect every student to be here (gestures with hand). And say, 'Okay if you can't cut it; sorry, I don't know what to tell you; you're going to fail.' My kids can be from here to here. But it's my job to know that. Each student is an individual. You have to know where they are on that continuum. That's what's great about Assessments for Learning; it's about the kids. It's about the students and making them better.

(Site Tips)

Matching Assessment Methods with Achievement Targets

RICK STIGGINS: Now I want to call your attention to the second figure in your packet of materials, and that's a figure that crosses the different kinds of achievement targets – knowledge, reasoning, skills and products – with a variety of assessment methods that we have at our disposal.

In this case, there are four also. We can use selected response modes of assessment – that's the old multiple-choice test that we all grew up with – or matching or true/false. Another method of assessment is the essay mode, where we present students with an essay exercise, and they create a brief written, originally constructed response. Then another method we have at our disposal is performance assessment – our trendy new friend. It's gotten a lot of publicity these days. It's a powerful tool; it's one of many. In this case, we observe students while they're doing things or evaluate the products that they've created. Then, fourth and finally, at the far right there's a method of assessment that we call a class of assessments that we call personal communication, in which we gather evidence of student achievement the old-fashion way by talking to them.

What this chart does then is to cross those assessment methods with the different kinds of achievement targets. When you get a chance, I want you to read through this table, and you'll see where the strong matches are. Each cell of the table depicts a union between a particular kind of achievement and a particular assessment method; and some of those matches are strong and some aren't.

Embracing a properly balanced assessment system

RICK STIGGINS: There are three sort of new ideas, or ideas that we've been working with extensively over the past couple of years that I want to share with you as part of this presentation.

The first of these is the idea of the need to develop balanced assessment systems, balanced and instructionally relevant assessment systems. There are three or four things that need to be in balance as we think about assessment and accountability in a high school.

One is we need to balance our concern for student performance on standardized tests with our concern for the quality and the effective use of the day-to-day classroom assessment process. What I want to do is to suggest that we've got to keep standardized tests in perspective. Certainly, they're important in student lives, and they're important as accountability tools; but they're not the assessments that determine, in kids' minds, what's important or how they're doing. Those are the things that focus kids, at least, on the day-to-day classroom assessment process.

I'm not opposed to statewide assessments; I'm not opposed to a college admissions test; I'm simply saying that we've got to keep them in perspective and keep them in balance with the day-to-day classroom assessment process.

In addition, we've got to be in balance about our achievement targets. I talked about this a little bit. Different kinds of achievement – knowledge and reasoning and skills and products. Teachers used to be obsessed with knowledge and reasoning targets; that's why the multiple-choice test used to dominate decades ago. Now we're obsessed with skill and product targets, and that's why performance assessment is dominating.

We have these pendulums that tend to swing in extremes when, in fact, I'm suggesting to you that what we ought to be doing is paying attention to the relationship among the four kinds of achievement that we hold as important for our students because each is a foundation of the other. And not be obsessed with one or the other, but understand that knowledge and understanding is important, reasoning is important, skills are important and so are product development targets. We need to be in balance about those things.

Does improved assessment practice increase student achievement?

RICK STIGGINS: One question that people commonly ask is: Is there evidence that better classroom assessment or enhanced classroom assessment yields gains in student achievement?

Boy, is there. It turns out that a recently published research synthesis that is a metaanalysis of a variety of 50 studies conducted around the world yielded some very interesting results that had to do with improved student-involved classroom assessment yielding greater student motivation, time savings for teachers and boosts in student achievement.

I want to comment on that boost in student achievement because what these researchers, Paul Black and Dylan Williams, from King's University in London, report in their research is that if we enhance the quality of classroom assessment—that is, make sure that we're gathering dependable information and providing quality feedback—and combine that with student involvement in the assessment process, where we use classroom assessment

to help students to continuously see where they are now in relation to where we want them to be; and we do that as a matter of routine, they report achievement gains on periodic standardized achievement tests of as much as seven-tenths of a standard deviation.

To translate that into terms that will make more sense to you, we're talking about a boost attributable to enhanced quality of classroom assessment. In grade equivalent terms, for example at grade three, of as many as three grade levels; at seventh grade, as many as four grade levels. We're talking about dependable increases in student achievement of, say, 15 percentile points on average, which means some students would exceed that.

The thing about their data is that it doesn't just come from the United Kingdom or the United States; it's based on about 40 studies of the relationship between classroom assessment and student achievement gathered around the world, including Asia, the U.S., Europe. These are irrefutable results, and if you've been into the school improvement literature at all, you know that if we can find a school improvement innovation that will boost student achievement as much as one-tenth of a standard deviation dependably, we feel we've got a breakthrough.

Well, these people are talking four- to seven-tenths of a standard deviation boost in student achievement and, by any measure, as a school improvement innovation that's profound.

Saving time through proper assessment practice

RICK STIGGINS: As it turns out, carefully implement, student-involved classroom assessment not only isn't a time eater, but it's a huge time saver, returning to teachers huge time and energy dividends through the student involvement.

Let me just spell out for your briefly where some of the time savings are. To the extent that we can really zero in on the essential achievement targets, we put a frame around the things we and our students are accountable for. If we do that very, very carefully, we can narrow down on the really essential targets, and that can save time.

If we can divide up responsibility across grade levels in a thoughtful way, we can eliminate enough redundancy and irrelevance to make everybody's job easier.

But, beyond that, the idea of students being partners in the assessment process shifts some of the responsibility for that to students, from teachers to students; and it doesn't turn out to be a shirking of responsibility, it turns out to be good teaching. It's like the ultimate in a win-win situation.

Power of Student Involvement in Assessment Process

RICK STIGGINS: In addition, one of the other things we deeply believe in at our institute is in the power of student involvement in the assessment process. We believe that a strong relationship can be established between assessment and student motivation if we open the assessment process up and bring students into that process as full partners.

But just using assessment as a source of rewards and punishments for accountability or intimidation, we believe, doesn't provide the kind of motivational model that's going to work in this case.

I'm Rick Stiggins of the Assessment Training Institute in Portland, Oregon, and I appreciated having the opportunity to talk with you about these ideas. If there's anything we can do at our institute to help you as you face the challenges of classroom assessment, be sure to let us know. Thanks. Have a good day.

Teachers shares their experience in moving to skills based assessments

VOICEOVER: These teachers have been involved in the yearlong program studying Stiggins' Assessment for Learning. Let's listen to the teachers and an instructional leader as they describe how changing the way they assess has helped their students reach their learning goals.

RON GROSEL: For me, I teach English. We were testing on characters in a novel, on settings, on themes, objective questions that aren't real important, more content based. With the standards, it was more aligned with skills, and I realized that my tests from the past weren't going to cut it anymore. I basically had to revise them throughout the year.

I have done away with mostly objective questions – multiple-choice, matching, that kind of thing based on content; and went more to skill-based tests – more short answers, more extended responses, actually reading passages that students have not seen before related to novels or plays where they have to do some reading or kind of matching that to the target that I'm looking at.

RAMONA BRADSHAW: Previously, my assessment was very rote. I didn't give very much thinking to the connection between student learning and the assessment. I worked from a textbook; I have a manual; I used the standard test. I did not evaluate the test to see if I was actually assessing students on learning targets that I had taught. There was some disconnection there, and it never dawned on me before Assessment for Learning that it's very important for student achievement that I'm actually testing on the learning objectives that are taught.

MARY DULWORTH: Standards are huge. We're talking about the backbone of our profession. And they're needed so that we know what we're supposed to be teaching. Again, though, I have students on different continuums of those standards. Some of them may have

gotten behind, or some of them may have not met the standards from a year or two or three before.

The standards are important, yes; and you align those standards to your assessments so that you can gauge that growth. But, again, each student is an individual. You have to know where they are on that continuum and take those standards that they need so that you're moving them to where they're supposed to be.

In a school district like mine and in a building like mine, my kids can be from here to here; but it's my job to know that and to take the standards that they need and make sure that it fits. Then I'm going to get those results that I need. But I can't expect every student to be here and say, Okay, well if you can't cut it, sorry, I don't know what to tell you. You're going to fail.

That's what's great about Assessment for Learning. It's about the kids; it about the students and making them better.

RAMONA BRADSHAW: It's very important to use different assessments with different students as all learners learn differently. Using the full-range of assessments as far as multiple-choice or extended response; all of those meet the goals of getting the responses from the students that indicate their maximum learning.

LANI WILDOW: Testing at Northwest High School before we became involved with the Assessment for Learning, has kind of evolved over the years. It started out, I would guess, pretty traditional. We give paper and pencil tests, multiple-choice, true/false; not really gearing it towards any specific thing.

The Assessment for Learning, along with the Ohio Content Standards, has really helped us focus on what we need to learn, which has made teachers' assessments much more focused to the content standards. What I find really neat about this process is they're telling kids that upfront. They're posting the grade-level indicators for the class that they're teaching. They're letting children know in advance what their test is going to be. That not only helps the teachers focus, but it has helped the kids focus on what they need to learn too.

RAMONA BRADSHAW: Clear communication with the students regarding authentic assessment is crucial. In order for them to know what they are trying to achieve, they have to understand where we're starting from. What is the goal? They need to know exactly what I'm asking them to perform.

As I said, I'm in career and technical information, and there are certain skills that the students have to be able to perform in order to pass the state board test. I need to be able to

provide that outcome for them so that they clearly understand what I'm asking them to produce.

Using rubrics to establishing an end target

RON GROSEL: Clear communication with students is very important. I think rubrics, giving rubrics ahead of time prior to an essay, for example, is very important. It's important that students know what you're going to be grading them on, what the different pieces mean. It's important that they have been given student samples that they can use the rubric and know what is quality and what isn't quality; and just knowing what that end target looks like so they can actually hit it.

RAMONA BRADSHAW: It is a tremendous confidence builder. Before using the Assessment for Learning, the kid-friendly language, clear target and learning objectives, the students were not sure if they were learning. They can now communicate clearly that they have reached the mark because they know exactly what they're to perform based on the objectives.

LANI WILDOW: As we've gone through this year, I've seen the range of assessments widen in that teachers realize that multiple-choice or just essay are not always the best way to go. English teachers are now using essays and multiple-choice and true/false in ways that they hadn't before, along with performance assessment. People like my industrial arts teacher are using not just performance assessments but multiple-choice and true/false. The type of assessment that we're giving children has drastically increased.

LIZ GRUBER: A lot of the assessments that we've created this year through Assessment for Learning are performance based at second grade because a lot of the things that we want them to know, it's easier to find out if they can do it through performance than a written test. That really has helped a lot with the students with disabilities because a lot of them do have trouble writing and reading and that kind of thing; so when we're doing performance assessments they can usually do them. It shows me that they know the indicator or they know the information, and it's not an issue of they just can't read the questions or they just can't write what they know. That's been really helpful.

RAMONA BRADSHAW: Integrating the assessment, allowing the students to evaluate their work through peer evaluation or having them help to create the rubric or the scoring guide helps the students to focus on the components that are crucial for them to be successful. It helps them to recognize what they need to perform in order to achieve the goal.

It makes it much more comfortable for them when they take the state board exam. They know exactly what's required, and they know exactly how to achieve that task.

MARY DULWORTH: It has benefited the students because I think they realize that they are cared about personally, and that I'm looking at them personally trying to help them reach the same standard that maybe the other students that have never had that challenge before. The self-confidence, the self-esteem that's helped them.

SUZANNA HARRIS: Every little bit helps, and it always goes back to this idea that your students are what's important. That's our job. Knowing your students – where they came from, where you want them to go. Proficiency tests are important. OGT is important. Standards are important. All of that good stuff. But as a teacher, you also want them to be these lifelong learners; that even when you're not standing there, they're going to want to keep going.

With Assessment for Learning, you're giving them that responsibility. You're saying, I want you to be part of this. I'm not the king teacher. I want you to help me figure this out and tell me what you think. Especially for at-risk kids, kids that some would call low achieving— they love this. They own it, so their performance is absolutely incredible. And it's Miss D, Miss D, what do you think? Did I do this? What do you think about the rubric? They get so excited about it. It's the little things that you can give them and allow them to own that can make the total difference.