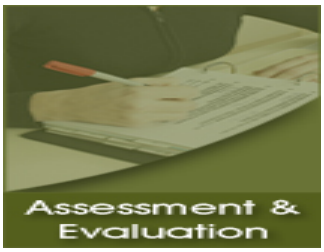
Assessment and Evaluation Branch

Information Bulletin



Assessment for Learning **April 2008**

As educators, we have become increasingly aware of the importance of assessment, not simply for grading purposes, but assessment that serves to encourage and stimulate learning. Assessment should and does take many forms, both summative and formative, and few would dispute the merits of using the variety that exists to ensure that as educators we foster learning. In the February edition of the Information Bulletin, it was noted that employing formative assessment practice includes frequent ***interactive*** assessments of student progress and understanding. The focus of this Information Bulletin is to highlight research and practice into ways in which we can facilitate interactive assessment; and as such, further develop thinking, learning and achievement for our students.

Formative Assessment

Using formative assessment in the classroom involves using information effectively. By setting clear learning targets, both the teacher and the student can gauge successful learning. Students can and should play an active part in this by recording the target and measuring mastery against the desired outcome and the skills required to reach that outcome. If mastery is not accomplished, students should be encouraged to deconstruct their understanding of the topic and identify in which area(s) they are having difficulty.

Rick Stiggins cites research on feedback conducted over the past two decades finding, "When students are informed about the learning targets from the beginning, engage in self-assessment, keep track of and regularly reflect on their own growth, and play a role in communicating their learning – the achievement gains are profound" (2008, p.44). This same study, a meta-analysis of over 180 000 different studies on the influence of feedback on student achievement, found the highest effect on achievement was as a result of specific and directed feedback on tasks. Lower effect sizes were related to praise, rewards and punishment (Hattie, Timperley, 2007, p.84).

Ruth Butler's seminal study (1988) on motivation and the effects of assessment practices found there was a 30% improvement on a second similar assignment when students were given comments alone on the initial assignment. Notably, there was no improvement when feedback on the first assignment consisted of marks only or comments and marks. Another interesting finding of the study was when students were asked if they would like to learn more about the topic, only those that scored high marks in the comments-and-marks and marks-only category wanted to learn more; all of the students in the comments-only group wanted to know more.

Encouraging Self-Assessment

Meta-cognition is the process of thinking about thinking. When we reflect on what we have done, we are often the best judge as to how we would have done things differently and what we could do to improve. Michael Fullan states, "An event is not an experience until you reflect upon it." Self assessment allows students to reflect and articulate their learning. Providing the opportunity to reflect on work and share our ideas, digs deeper into the process of learning on an individual level.

2008 Assessment Schedule

Grade 10 FSL Literacy Assessment—Reading and Writing: Week of April 21

Grade 12 FSL Oral Proficiency Evaluation (2nd Semester): April-May

Provincial Assessment Grade 2 Reading & Writing: May 27-30

Provincial Assessment Grade 4 Reading & Writing: June 4-10

Provincial Assessment Grade 5 Mathematics: June 4-10

Provincial Assessment Grade 6 Science: June 4-10

Middle Level Math Assessment: June 9 & 10

Potential Graduate Reassessment: June 9

Arthur Costa, author of the *Habits of Mind* series, is an advocate of encouraging student self-assessment. He notes, "We know that kids get better and learn more when they are involved in their own assessment." He encourages the empowerment of students, having them take charge of their learning and evaluation which, he argues, will aid in the development of an internal set of criteria for themselves. He states, "The goal is to find ways to assess whether kids are getting better over time and to also help kids to assess their own thinking. We want students to become self-assessors who reflect upon an activity and the thinking that they used to be successful. We want them to transfer that thinking to help them navigate new situations. Focusing on teaching of, reflecting on, and assessing good thinking helps students become better thinkers" (Costa, p. 322).

Rubrics

A powerful tool in encouraging self assessment is the rubric. By definition, a rubric is a code, or a set of codes designed to govern action (Jonassen, 1999, p.221). Rubrics provide a guideline for students and take the guesswork out of how projects will be judged. The ultimate goal of a rubric is to improve performance by clarifying expectations and focussing learning.

Tips on Developing rubrics:

- State the lesson or assignment objective.
- Decide on the dimensions of performance, product or proficiency to be assessed. What does mastery of the lesson or assignment objective look like in its parts? What do you truly want to assess?
- Develop a scale to measure proficiency for each dimension. The ratings should be distinct, comprehensive, descriptive and cover the range of proficiencies possible and should relate to the lesson or assignment objective. Sometimes simple two-scale (yes/no) ratings can be used while others may require a three-point or five-point scale etc. for finer distinctions between categories. Clearly defining descriptors such as "weak", "good", "excellent" and identifying the degrees of success for each criterion *using exemplars*, encourages self-assessment and allows for clarity in teacher assessment and reporting.
- Pilot test the rubric on student work; have colleagues do the same. High quality rubrics are developed over time.

Exemplars

Providing exemplars clarifies expected outcomes and standards. When students analyse other students' work, they see how to reflect the outcome in various forms and stages of mastery. They also internalize the criteria that will be used to assess their own work (Davis, 2000, p.31). If students are involved in rubric development, allow them to analyse exemplars to identify the important features of both the work and the criteria they would use to assess the work. Providing the opportunity to explore what quality work looks like is a valuable process, has a significant connection with assessment for learning, and develops students' ability to use the criteria as feedback while they are learning.

Assessment in the "real world"

Authentic assessment aims at linking assessment to what is perceived as needed skills. Gulikers, et al (2008) found that students who perceive an assessment as more authentic, report studying more deeply rather than skimming the surface of a topic.

In an interesting Danish study, Tanggaard & Elmholdt (2008) correlated assessment practice within adult apprenticeship programs to assessment in the classroom. In their findings the authors highlight the following important characteristics of learning:

> Mastery is not a linear progression through predetermined stages, and assessment through increased responsibility requires flexible judgement. Progression through the more challenging tasks communicates success to the learner.
>
> Direct messages or feedback as to the quality of work is preferable to no feedback, vague or non-transparent feedback.
>
> Peer evaluation: They note that in Jesuit schools of the 15th Century, students learned best by teaching others, the idea being that they would benefit from the discipline, perseverance, and diligence that teaching others requires.
>
> *Assessment by ongoing recognition is integrated into everyday life, recognizing, accepting and respecting the efforts and results of the work done by the apprentice.*

As with apprenticeship programs, in the classrooms our students are placed in the role of apprentice as teachers mould students' understanding and knowledge of different subject areas. Encouraging self-reflection and self-assessment creates a rich learning environment and develops thinking skills for use throughout a lifetime of learning.

As students participate in assessment, they learn to become partners in a continuous assessment cycle. In this cycle, students talk about what needs to be learned, set criteria, and receive and give themselves descriptive feedback…They debrief their learning, and revisit the criteria as they learn more. They present their work to others and receive more feedback. This cycle continues as students are involved in resetting criteria and continuing their learning (Anne Davis, 2000, p.3).