

3d

USING ASSESSMENT IN INSTRUCTION

Assessment of student learning plays an important new role in teaching: no longer signaling the *end* of instruction, it is now recognized to be an integral *part* of instruction. While assessment *of* learning has always been and will continue to be an important aspect of teaching (it's important for teachers to know whether students have learned what teachers intend), assessment *for* learning has increasingly come to play an important role in classroom practice. And in order to assess student learning for the purposes of instruction, teachers must have a “finger on the pulse” of a lesson, monitoring student understanding and, where feedback is appropriate, offering it to students.

A teacher's actions in monitoring student learning, while they may superficially look the same as those used in monitoring student behavior, have a fundamentally different purpose. When monitoring behavior, teachers are alert to students who may be passing notes or bothering their neighbors; when monitoring student learning, teachers look carefully at what students are writing, or listen carefully to the questions students ask, in order to gauge whether they require additional activity or explanation to grasp the content. In each case, the teacher may be circulating in the room, but his or her purpose in doing so is quite different in the two situations.

Similarly, on the surface, questions asked of students for the purpose of monitoring learning are fundamentally different from those used to build understanding; in the former, the questions seek to reveal students' misconceptions, whereas in the latter the questions are designed to explore relationships or deepen understanding. Indeed, for the purpose of monitoring, many teachers create questions specifically to elicit the extent of student understanding and use additional techniques (such as exit tickets) to determine the degree of understanding of every student in the class. Teachers at high levels of performance in this component, then, demonstrate the ability to encourage students and actually teach them the necessary skills of monitoring their own learning against clear standards.

But as important as monitoring student learning and providing feedback to students are, however, they are greatly strengthened by a teacher's skill in making mid-course corrections when needed, seizing on a “teachable moment,” or enlisting students' particular interests to enrich an explanation.

DOMAIN 3 • INSTRUCTION

The elements of component 3d are:

Assessment criteria

It is essential that students know the criteria for assessment. At its highest level, students themselves have had a hand in articulating the criteria (for example, of a clear oral presentation).

Monitoring of student learning

A teacher's skill in eliciting evidence of student understanding is one of the true marks of expertise. This is not a hit-or-miss effort, but is planned carefully in advance. Even after planning carefully, however, a teacher must weave monitoring of student learning seamlessly into the lesson, using a variety of techniques.

Feedback to students

Feedback on learning is an essential element of a rich instructional environment; without it, students are constantly guessing at how they are doing and at how their work can be improved. Valuable feedback must be timely, constructive, and substantive and must provide students the guidance they need to improve their performance.

Student self-assessment and monitoring of progress

The culmination of students' assumption of responsibility for their learning is when they monitor their own learning and take appropriate action. Of course, they can do these things only if the criteria for learning are clear and if they have been taught the skills of checking their work against clear criteria.

Indicators include:

- The teacher paying close attention to evidence of student understanding
- The teacher posing specifically created questions to elicit evidence of student understanding
- The teacher circulating to monitor student learning and to offer feedback
- Students assessing their own work against established criteria

UNSATISFACTORY • LEVEL 1

Students do not appear to be aware of the assessment criteria, and there is little or no monitoring of student learning; feedback is absent or of poor quality. Students do not engage in self- or peer assessment.

CRITICAL ATTRIBUTES

- The teacher gives no indication of what high-quality work looks like.
- The teacher makes no effort to determine whether students understand the lesson.
- Students receive no feedback, or feedback is global or directed to only one student.
- The teacher does not ask students to evaluate their own or classmates' work.

POSSIBLE EXAMPLES

- *A student asks, "How is this assignment going to be graded?"*
- *A student asks, "Is this the right way to solve this problem?" but receives no information from the teacher.*
- *The teacher forges ahead with a presentation without checking for understanding.*
- *After the students present their research on globalization, the teacher tells them their letter grade; when students ask how he arrived at the grade, the teacher responds, "After all these years in education, I just know what grade to give."*
- *And others...*

BASIC • LEVEL 2

Students appear to be only partially aware of the assessment criteria, and the teacher monitors student learning for the class as a whole. Questions and assessments are rarely used to diagnose evidence of learning. Feedback to students is general, and few students assess their own work.

- There is little evidence that the students understand how their work will be evaluated.
- The teacher monitors understanding through a single method, or without eliciting evidence of understanding from students.
- Feedback to students is vague and not oriented toward future improvement of work.
- The teacher makes only minor attempts to engage students in self- or peer assessment.

- *The teacher asks, "Does anyone have a question?"*
- *When a student completes a problem on the board, the teacher corrects the student's work without explaining why.*
- *The teacher says, "Good job, everyone."*
- *The teacher, after receiving a correct response from one student, continues without ascertaining whether other students understand the concept.*
- *The students receive their tests back; each one is simply marked with a letter grade at the top.*
- *And others...*

PROFICIENT • LEVEL 3

Students appear to be aware of the assessment criteria, and the teacher monitors student learning for groups of students. Questions and assessments are regularly used to diagnose evidence of learning. Teacher feedback to groups of students is accurate and specific; some students engage in self-assessment.

- The teacher makes the standards of high-quality work clear to students.
- The teacher elicits evidence of student understanding.
- Students are invited to assess their own work and make improvements; most of them do so.
- Feedback includes specific and timely guidance, at least for groups of students.

- *The teacher circulates during small-group or independent work, offering suggestions to students.*
- *The teacher uses specifically formulated questions to elicit evidence of student understanding.*
- *The teacher asks students to look over their papers to correct their errors; most of them engage in this task.*
- *And others...*

DISTINGUISHED • LEVEL 4

Assessment is fully integrated into instruction, through extensive use of formative assessment. Students appear to be aware of, and there is some evidence that they have contributed to, the assessment criteria. Questions and assessments are used regularly to diagnose evidence of learning by individual students. A variety of forms of feedback, from both teacher and peers, is accurate and specific and advances learning. Students self-assess and monitor their own progress. The teacher successfully differentiates instruction to address individual students' misunderstandings.

- Students indicate that they clearly understand the characteristics of high-quality work, and there is evidence that students have helped establish the evaluation criteria.
- The teacher is constantly “taking the pulse” of the class; monitoring of student understanding is sophisticated and continuous and makes use of strategies to elicit information about individual student understanding.
- Students monitor their own understanding, either on their own initiative or as a result of tasks set by the teacher.
- High-quality feedback comes from many sources, including students; it is specific and focused on improvement.

- *The teacher reminds students of the characteristics of high-quality work, observing that the students themselves helped develop them.*
- *While students are working, the teacher circulates, providing specific feedback to individual students.*
- *The teacher uses popsicle sticks or exit tickets to elicit evidence of individual student understanding.*
- *Students offer feedback to their classmates on their work.*
- *Students evaluate a piece of their writing against the writing rubric and confer with the teacher about how it could be improved.*
- *And others...*