

Knowing is Everything – Everyday Assessment

by Nancy Knowlton

There is no question today that there is an intense focus on accountability for education. In most countries, education is one of the top two expenditures, along with health care. Countries, states and districts routinely examine their relative performance on standardized tests in language, math and science and bemoan the level of their students' achievement, either relative to the last placement or relative to other countries.

Some jurisdictions have enacted legislation that puts the focus squarely on student achievement. In the U.S., *No Child Left Behind* is one example where student performance on standardized tests is being directly linked to teacher and school evaluations. While there is a raging debate about the mechanism that has been chosen to focus attention on achievement in the U.S., it is clear that the issue of student achievement is central to the future of education.



Teaching to the Test

With so much at stake with this new approach to accountability, it is little wonder that critics of *No Child Left Behind* claim that it pressures teachers to teach to the test. Good practice can be thrown out the proverbial window with such a focus on test results.

Good Assessment Practice

Education professionals agree that good assessment really encompasses a number of practices, including everyday feedback and input to students, the creation of student portfolios to demonstrate their accumulation of knowledge in a variety of media and end-of-unit or end-of-semester tests

Everyday Feedback and Input

That students are mastering or struggling with a concept should not come as a surprise to either teachers or students at the time of a formal test. That's where everyday assessment and feedback comes in. Done properly, it allows teachers to know how the class collectively is progressing and how individual students are progressing.

It is in this area of assessment that we believe that our interactive response systems can make the greatest contribution to teaching and learning. They give teachers a bird's eye view of individual and class performance.

Reteaching a Concept

If few students grasp a concept, then teachers can know that immediately and take corrective action in the next class, perhaps adding more visual materials or more time for student questions.

Delivering Immediate Feedback to Students

Within the SMART interactive response system software, teachers can add commentary to class quiz results so that students can understand why their answer choice was correct or incorrect. (These comments are added at the time that quizzes are set up.) This commentary could include references to the textbook as well as other online material that could assist in reinforcing the concepts as students review their test results.

The important point to note is that teachers provide this commentary to the students immediately, not several days later after tests have been scored and returned. When students spend a few minutes reviewing and reinforcing knowledge acquired, they are not just developing good study habits – they can see tangible and immediate learning gains..

Assigning Additional Work

Mastery of concepts most often involves work – more for some students than others. When a teacher can understand where students are failing to master concepts, he can immediately assign remedial work in order to allow those students to catch up with the rest of the class. Teachers need not rely on students to self-identify when they encounter problems, and learning can move more toward an individualized process.

Formative and Summative Assessment

Assessment needs to be varied and it needs to consider the strengths and weaknesses of all learners. When teachers can know rather than guess how well their students are performing throughout a unit or semester, then their ability to really assist students increases. Using the SMART interactive response system can greatly aid teachers in their quest for that up-to-date knowledge about student comprehension and mastery.

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