



Six Steps Toward Improved Assessment

Evaluations don't always have to be high-stakes to be effective

By Mary C. Clement

Assessment is a scary word. When teachers hear it, they immediately think of two things: the dreaded standardized tests or their own annual performance evaluations. Assessment shouldn't always be high-stakes, though; it should be formative, based on objectives, done in the manner in which teaching is done, and performed to provide data that helps all

stakeholders. Assessment is for learning, and it informs best practices in teaching. Here's how to pursue it.

Make Assessment Informal and Formative

Before conducting teacher observations, remind them of the value of informal, formative assessments. Most teachers are already making assessments of students' understanding by watching their facial expressions, body language, and overall engagement. Open-ended questions help assess what has been learned better than simple yes-or-no or one-word-answer questions.

Informal assessments that engage students work well. When students hold up a whiteboard to solve math problems or write answers, the teacher gets instant feedback. Adding

technology to a lesson with the Kahoot! app or a similar program might also help hold students' attention and assess their learning.

Make Assessment Objective-Based

Assessments should align with the curriculum taught. When teachers plan a lesson, they should consider which methods of assessment they will use during and after it, and establish a clear learning objective. If it is for the student to be able to write an introductory sentence for a paragraph, for example, the teacher must decide whether the student has written an appropriate sentence based on the criteria established.

If the objective is, "The student will be able to solve addition problems with double-digit numbers," teachers can make an informal assessment



FURTHER READING:

A Teacher's Guide to Classroom Assessment: Understanding and Using Assessment to Improve Student Learning and Designing Effective Assessments (2014) by Susan M. Butler and Nancy D. McMunn.

during class as students practice and a formal assessment after the class. How do teachers know that their instruction was successful? They assess students' learning for each lesson objective.

Align Assessment to Instruction

The alignment of instruction to assessment is critically important for the assessment's validity. When young students learn to count, we assess their knowledge by listening; you don't need to make them spell their numbers. Performance assessments may include a final project, paper, portfolio, or presentation, but these should be practiced in class before assessment. Even young children know when they are being tested on something differently than it was presented in class.

Convert Assessment Into Grades

Assigning final grades to assessments and calculating nine-week or semester grades has a long history and won't likely change in the near future. Grades help parents and other stakeholders track children's progress.

The best grading policies include consistent scales across grade levels. For example, earning an A in language arts should be 90 percent in every fifth grade, rather than a unique scale set by each fifth-grade teacher. Total point systems work well and translate to electronic spreadsheets easily.

Neither parents nor administrators like surprises. Support teachers by supplying timelines for early warning notices about student achievement and standardized forms or letters about the school's testing and assessment practices.

Make Programwide and Schoolwide Assessments

Changes are ongoing in today's schools. When teachers request a new reading program or when a different math curriculum is on the horizon, assessment can provide the data to inform a good decision. When a


change must happen, consider a four-step assessment plan:

1. Assess what is being done now. Consider a survey to find out whether what's being done is absolutely needed.
2. Explain the potential change to all involved, and ask for input.
3. Make the change, including written objectives for the change.
4. Assess the change based on desired outcomes to ascertain success.

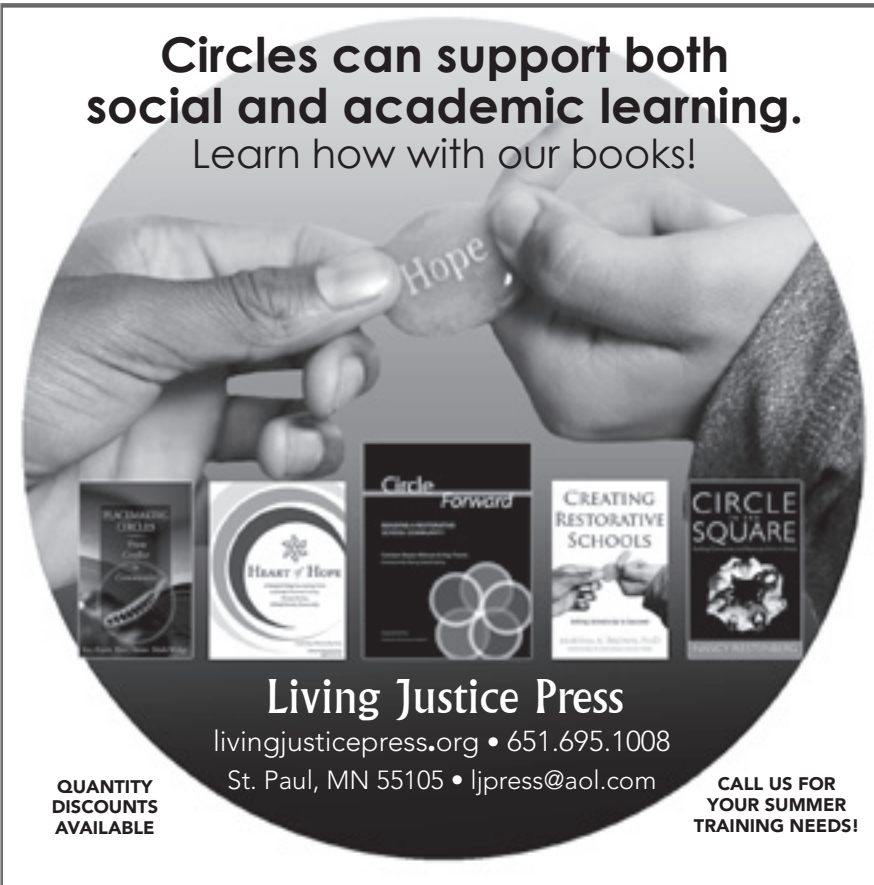
When a system is in place for the use of assessment to implement changes, faculty understand decisions better. As a principal, you can share assessment data with the faculty, school boards, families, and communities to keep stakeholders well-informed.

Assessment of Teachers

There are many corollaries between assessment of students and assessment of teachers. Feedback is helpful before a high-stakes assessment such as a decision on rehiring. A teacher's assessment should be based on predetermined objectives for their work, and it should parallel what they have been told about the evaluation process.

One factor in a teacher's assessment is how they assess their students. All teachers must find effective ways to determine what students know and are able to do. Assessment doesn't have to be threatening, but instead it should be a recognized approach to improving student learning, gathering data for decisions, and supporting strong teaching. 

Mary C. Clement is a professor of teacher education at Berry College in Rome, Georgia.



Circles can support both social and academic learning.
Learn how with our books!

Living Justice Press
livingjusticepress.org • 651.695.1008
St. Paul, MN 55105 • ljpress@aol.com

QUANTITY DISCOUNTS AVAILABLE

CALL US FOR YOUR SUMMER TRAINING NEEDS!