

Assessment for Learning



This curriculum insert focuses on assessment strategies that all classroom teachers will find useful. It is adapted from *Learning Together: Successful teaching in combined grades*, ETFO's new resource for teachers of combined grades. *Learning Together* is available from shopETFO. Go to shopetfo.etfo.ca → Publications.

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Plan assessment for learning

Assessment is an integral part of learning. Good assessment takes into account learning styles, strengths, and needs. It is flexible and reflects a student's achievement against a set criteria, not against another student. Effective assessment takes place over time and is varied in its approach.

Assessment is not an add-on and it is not teacher-centred. Assessment is part of learning and that means it is an ongoing part of every day.

- For the teacher, assessment is the process of gathering information about student learning that informs our teaching.
- For the student, assessment is the process that informs them about their learning. Most often this feedback is done through formative assessment strategies.



CONSIDER

Identify the purpose of assessment

Assessment *for* learning directly influences student learning by reinforcing the connections between assessment and instruction. Assessment *for* learning occurs as a part of everyday teaching and learning and uses information from ongoing assessment to shape classroom teaching and learning. Assessment *as* learning puts the students in an active role as learners, using assessment information to self-assess, regulate, and monitor their learning progress.

Effective assessment practices are responsive to the strengths, needs, and clearly articulated learning destinations of the students.

Decide what effective assessment looks like

Several things are visible in a classroom where effective assessment is taking place:

- Clear criteria for specific learning targets and goals (geared towards each grade) are visible around the classroom;
- Words, pictures, illustrations, and/or exemplars of student work are posted around the classroom; and
- Students are involved in collaborative assessment of their work with peers and/or the teacher.

Decide what effective assessment sounds like

- Ongoing feedback from the teacher and other students is taking place;
- Students are using the language of clear criteria to check their own progress; and
- Students are using student-friendly language when assessing their work.

USE REFERENCE CHARTS

Ontario curriculum expectations can be displayed for reference and discussion as students learn. When students know the standard they are aiming for, they are able to work more effectively towards their goals. Goal-setting, which is a major skill for effective life-long learning, then becomes an integral part of each day.

Ontario Reading Expectations

1.4 Reading

Demonstrate understanding of a variety of texts by identifying important ideas and some supporting details.

Show what you know about a lot of different types of books by looking at important thoughts and ideas and finding proof in the book

Success Criteria

- I told about the theme (main idea)
- I told about the main characters
- I told about the setting
- I told about the problem
- I told about the solution
- I told about the beginning, middle and end
- I told the story in order and used "time words" (first, second, then, next, after, last, finally)
- I used proof from the text (because...)
- I added important details

A hand-drawn 'Quick Assessment Board' with a grid of student names and small icons. The board is titled 'Quick Assessment Board' and has a grid of 5 rows and 5 columns. Each cell contains a student's name and a small icon (possibly a book or a checkmark). The names are: Row 1: Abby, Dana, Becca, Daniel, Tamar; Row 2: Colton, Fouad, Ken, Katelyn, Cheyenne; Row 3: Brendan, Yamilka, Baya, Juq, Emily J.; Row 4: Bianca, Michelle, Shadara, Halcno, Kris; Row 5: Sean, Emily B, Taylor, Sina, Hawer.

Students can take a proactive role in their learning

This is the core of a classroom that is student-involved. In order to do this effectively, students need to know and understand the learning targets and goals of each subject area.

Students must know exactly what they are learning and why they are learning that specific target or goal. It is also essential that the teacher guides and coaches the students so they can develop ownership towards those learning targets and goals. Students must know exactly what they are looking for in order to understand how to use this feedback effectively for their own learning.

Design assessment with flexibility

As students take more ownership over their own learning, the teacher is involved more in coaching and guiding that is geared towards a learning destination that is clearly understood by both teacher and students. Assessment does not focus only on content. It will focus on affective and responsive assessment as well. Responsive assessment is built into the day plan. Recording observations of what the students say and do will help the teacher know what and how they are learning.

When the teacher plans around a big idea, the content, the process, and the assessment all take shape. But each can change as the learning unfolds. Each step of the assessment process might take either student or the teacher in another direction.

Begin with the end in mind

An effective assessment plan must have learning goals and targets clearly defined. In addition to this, teachers must define what success looks like so that students can achieve the learning goal. In order to work towards student-involved assessment, the identified learning goals and defined success criteria need not only to be shared with the students, but also to be communicated in student-friendly language, so that there is a common understanding of how to achieve those learning goals.

Use diagnostic assessment to inform teaching

Diagnostic assessment is designed to discover what children know and what they are able to do. Use the KWL organizer as a guide. The chart is organized around three headings: *What we already know*; *What we want to learn*; and *What we have learned*. Using diagnostic assessment effectively enables the



combined-grade teacher to determine the teacher entry points for every student.

As a result of using effective diagnostic assessments, the teacher can immediately enter into the learning process with a specific focus for teaching and/or for intervention. Intervention can be most effective when it is timely and the student is searching for the next step in the process. Consequently, diagnostic assessment is a vital part of the learning process as it unfolds.

Let students take ownership over their own assessment

Fundamental to the concept of effective assessment is the idea that students will use assessments to help themselves learn better. To make that happen, teachers need to teach students how they can use assessment to help them learn.

First, students need to clearly understand the targets and goals for that unit of study. Those targets and goals need to be expressed in student-friendly language. Then, students need to see how they are proceeding towards those targets and how they will reach them.

Along the way as assessments are done, students need to be aware of how to use that information for themselves to further their own learning. Learning to work in partners from exemplars and samples, learning to give and take feedback from a peer, and learning to restructure a project with the exemplar in mind are all skills which need to be honed.

Once students understand how to involve themselves in the

assessment process, they can begin to take ownership over it. They can decide for themselves when they need to stop and review and when they need to attack a problem from a different vantage point. They can decide for themselves when they need the teacher or when a peer can help with the task. Students can also take ownership over communicating their learning achievements to their parents or guardians.

Student folders, learning journals, learning logs, and any other record of learning designed by the student can be taken home and shared. Many times the teacher will structure this home reporting by giving student an interview question to take home which can be shared the next day. It is all part of the student being responsible for his or her own learning.

Develop a tracking system that works for you

The management challenge lies in tracking each student's progress. All tracking should be done in relation to the learning goals and targets. Here are some tracking tips from experienced teachers:

- Post commonly used feedback comments or next steps on chart paper to use as a reference for students. This saves you time writing down every comment. It is the student who writes down the comment or next step;
- Look for an effective way to track anecdotal comments that is focused on specific learning targets/goals;
- Teach students how to use other student samples or exemplars to assess their own learning;
- Provide students with prompts on how to provide feedback and how to accept feedback; and
- Use diagnostic assessment data that truly determines what you will be teaching and assessing.

Clear communication is vital

Student-involved assessment is at the heart of effective assessment. Thus, clear communication with students and their parents or guardians is a key component to ensure that students are involved and engaged in their own learning. This can take place at the beginning of a new unit as well as during the unit.

Communication clearly shares the criteria for success with students and parents or guardians in student-friendly language. Such communication can take various forms:

- Sharing the learning targets/goals;
- Having student samples and student exemplars available;
- Indicating the various steps for each learning target/goal;

- Corresponding on how parents/guardians can support their child at home; and
- Providing immediate and focused feedback to students.

Practice self-reflection as you proceed

As you proceed with assessment, whether at the planning stage or during the unit, ask yourself the following questions:

- Am I clear about the goals for learning?
- Have I provided exemplars of what it looks like?
- Have I communicated the goals for learning to the students?
- Are the goals expressed in student-friendly language?
- Have I aligned the learning goal to the appropriate method?
- Did I create diagnostic assessments that truly assess what the students know and want to know?



Primary (CHECKLIST) Assessment FOR Learning

Learning Goals

- Learning goals are broken down into small, manageable chunks. Each 'chunk' is introduced through classroom mini-lessons and consolidated in small-group, guided practice opportunities.
- With teacher support and instruction, students gradually build upon their knowledge and understanding over time to independently achieve their learning goals.

Communication of Learning Goals to Students

- Use of performance standards with picture representations and/or hands-on analogies that explicitly connect students to the "target" or learning goal.
- Student-generated anchor charts that are clearly posted in the classroom for easy student reference.
- Learning goals that are framed using student-friendly language and provide explicit step-by-step explanations and procedures about thinking and development of learning goals.
- Display student work that has met the target alongside the performance standard

Student Self-Assessment

- Ongoing teacher- and student-led reflection about what a "Level 4" looks like.
- Whole-class assessment and discussion of a variety of students' work – "Does this piece meet our target? How could this student improve to better reach our goals?"
- Student-generated rubric and/or checklist based on the performance standard that allows students to monitor their own progress and development as learners.

Use of Diagnostic Assessment

- Use diagnostic assessments to guide the creation of the learning goal. This assessment drives instruction, future learning goals and immediate next steps.
- Use picture representations and/or graphs to involve students in looking at the diagnostic assessment as an indicator of where we are and where we want to go. Continue to use these pictorial representations throughout the learning goal to capture and celebrate student progress.
- Identify goals and next steps for students learning based on the diagnostic assessment.