

CHAPTER

2

Assessment *for* and *of* Learning

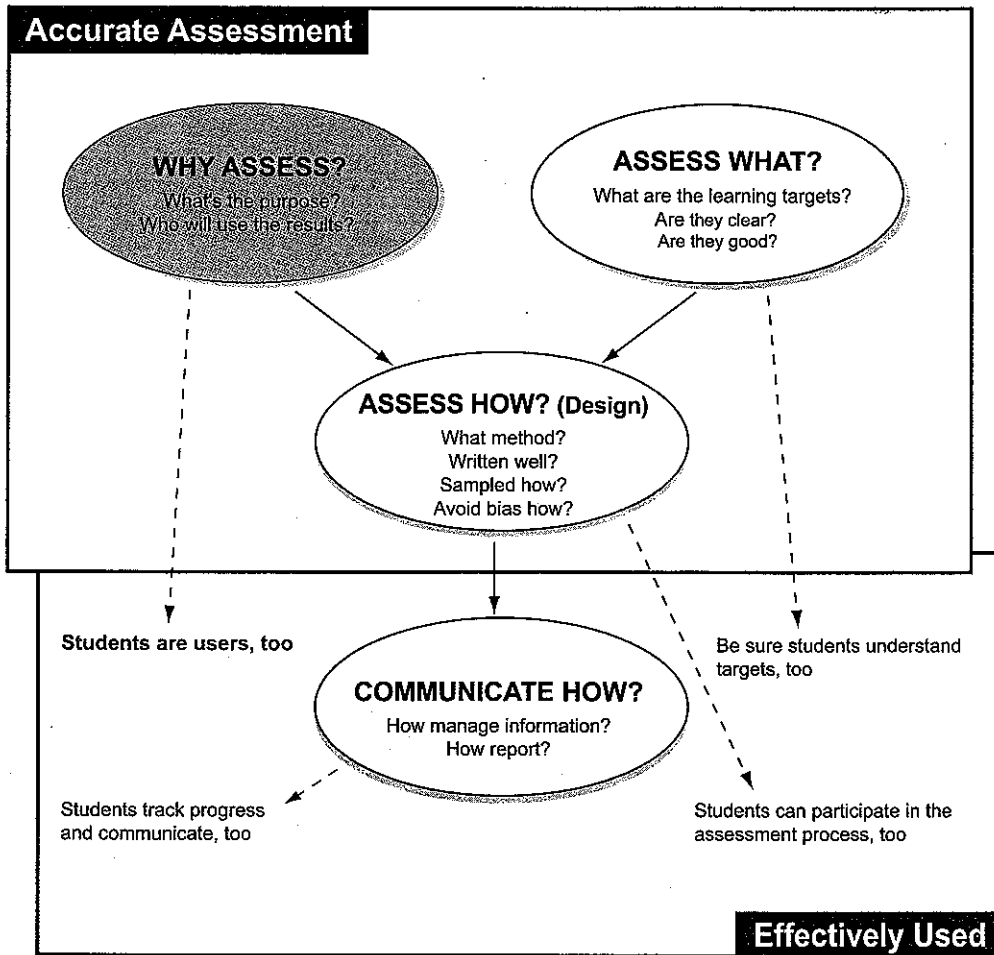
Self-assessment by pupils, far from being a luxury, is in fact an essential component of formative assessment. (Black & Wiliam, 1998)

Many people want to use assessment information, and they want to use it in many ways. Some wish to help students learn more, as when Ms. Weathersby uses writing rubrics in her English classes. Others wish to track student progress toward important learning outcomes, to decide where to allocate resources, to check which adoptions are most effective, to provide accountability information to the public, or to refer students for special services.

We can think of all assessment uses as falling into one of two general categories—assessments *FOR* learning and assessments *OF* learning. Both categories have their place in education and in the classroom—you've been doing both for years. What is perhaps new is an expanded understanding of the roles each should play to maximize student achievement while minimizing unintended negative consequences and side effects for students.

The goal of this chapter is to elaborate the differences and similarities between assessment *for* and *of* learning, relate them to student motivation and learning, and provide an organizing framework for assessment *for* learning in the classroom. In our discussion, we will concentrate on the shaded portions of Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1 Keys to Quality Classroom Assessment



What We Mean by Assessment *for* and *of* Learning

Table 2.2 shows *our* summary of the key differences between assessment *for* and *of* learning. Assessments *of* learning are those assessments that happen after learning is supposed to have occurred to determine if it did. They are used to make statements of student learning status at a point in time to those outside the classroom, as when making student referrals or making decisions about programs. State assessments, local standardized tests, and college admissions tests represent external examinations that do this. But we also conduct assessments *of* learning within the classroom when we gather evidence to determine a student's report card grade. Unit final exams and important projects often serve this purpose.

Assessments *for* learning happen while learning is still underway. These are the assessments that we conduct throughout teaching and learning to diagnose student needs, plan our next steps in instruction, provide students with feedback they can use to improve the quality of their work, and help students see and feel in control of their journey to success. Each one reveals to students increments of achievement and how to do better the next time. On these occasions, the grading function is laid aside. This is not about accountability—those are assessments *of* learning. This is about getting better.

DEEPEN UNDERSTANDING

Activity 2.1 Introduction to Assessment *for* Learning

Please watch the video clip on the accompanying DVD entitled "Assessment OF/FOR Learning: A Hopeful Vision of the Future." This clip shows Rick explaining the important distinctions between assessment *for* and *of* learning. While you are listening, please complete the form in Table 2.1 to track the differences. A printable version of Table 2.1 appears on the CD.

Table 2.1 Assessment for and of Learning: Selected Key Differences

	Assessment for Learning	Assessment of Learning
Reasons for Assessing		
Audience for Results		
Focus of Assessment— Learning Targets		
Place in Time		
Primary Users		
Typical Uses		
Teacher's Role		
Student's Role		
Primary Motivator for Students		
Example(s)		

State in your own words why the distinction between assessment *for* and *of* learning is important:

Table 2.2 Comparing Assessment for and of Learning: Overview of Key Differences

	Assessment for Learning	Assessment of Learning
Reasons for Assessing	Promote increases in achievement to help students meet more standards; support ongoing student growth; improvement	Document individual or group achievement or mastery of standards; measure achievement status at a point in time for purposes of reporting; accountability
Audience	Students about themselves	Others about students
Focus of Assessment	Specific achievement targets selected by teachers that enable students to build toward standards	Achievement standards for which schools, teachers, and students are held accountable
Place in Time	A process during learning	An event after learning
Primary Users	Students, teachers, parents	Policy makers, program planners, supervisors, teachers, students, parents
Typical Uses	Provide students with insight to improve achievement; help teachers diagnose and respond to student needs; help parents see progress over time; help parents support learning	Certify student competence; sort students according to achievement; promotion and graduation decisions; grading
Teacher's Role	Transform standards into classroom targets; inform students of targets; build assessments; adjust instruction based on results; offer descriptive feedback to students; involve students in assessment	Administer the test carefully to ensure accuracy and comparability of results; use results to help students meet standards; interpret results for parents; build assessments for report card grading
Student's Role	Self-assess and keep track of progress; contribute to setting goals; act on classroom assessment results to be able to do better next time	Study to meet standards; take the test; strive for the highest possible score; avoid failure
Primary Motivator	Belief that success in learning is achievable	Threat of punishment, promise of rewards
Examples	Using rubrics with students; student self-assessment; descriptive feedback to students	Achievement tests; final exams; placement tests; short cycle assessments

Source: Adapted from *Understanding School Assessment* (pp. 17–18), by J. Chappuis & S. Chappuis, 2002, Portland, OR: Assessment Training Institute. Copyright © 2006, 2002 Educational Testing Service. Adapted by permission.

A useful way to think practically about assessment *for* learning strategies that transform the assessment environment in the classroom comes from Royce Sadler, an Australian researcher:

A key premise is that for students to be able to improve, they must have the capacity to monitor the quality of their own work during actual production. This in turn requires that students:

- *Know what high quality work looks like*
- *Be able to objectively compare their work to the standard*
- *Have a store of tactics to make work better based on their observations*
(Sadler, 1989, p. 119)

In other words, if we want to use assessment as a tool for learning, students need to

- Know where they're going
- Know where they are now
- Know how to close the gap

As you'll recall, in Chapter 1 we mentioned that many different decision makers count on the availability of accurate information about student achievement to do their jobs to help students learn. We talked about teachers, students, parents, and district staff. Many of these users of assessment are shown in Table 2.3, categorized by major purpose: assessment *for* or *of* learning. As you look through Table 2.3, what do you notice?

Here's what we notice:

- Inside the classroom, assessment *for* and *of* learning are more balanced. For teachers, students, and parents, assessments *of* learning are not enough. This is especially true if the assessment *of* learning is from a once-a-year standardized test. These kinds of assessments don't provide the day-to-day information needed in the classroom. Yet much of our national assessment energy is expended on once-a-year tests.
- Those outside the classroom make almost purely assessment *of* learning decisions, many of which can be made from a once-a-year standardized test.
- Although assessment *of* learning is important, it is not sufficient. Once-a-year assessment meets only the needs of some of those who use assessment information. If the needs of all decision makers are not met, we are out of balance in our assessment systems.

Table 2.3 Purposes for (Users and Uses of) Assessment

Assessment User	Assessment for Learning	Assessment of Learning
Students	<p>Am I improving over time?</p> <p>Do I know what it means to succeed?</p> <p>What should I do next?</p> <p>What help do I need?</p>	<p>Am I succeeding at the level that I should be?</p> <p>Am I capable of success?</p> <p>How am I doing in relationship to my classmates?</p> <p>Is the learning worth the effort?</p>
Teachers	<p>What does this student need?</p> <p>What do these students need?</p> <p>What are student strengths to build on?</p> <p>How should I group my students?</p> <p>Am I going too fast? Too slow? Too far? Not far enough?</p>	<p>What grade do I put on the report card?</p> <p>What students need to be referred for special service?</p> <p>What will I tell parents?</p>
Parents	<p>What can we do at home to support learning?</p> <p>Is my child learning new things?</p>	<p>Is my child keeping up?</p> <p>Is this teacher doing a good job?</p> <p>Is this a good school? District?</p>
Principal		<p>Is instruction producing results?</p> <p>Are our students ready for the workplace or the next step in learning?</p> <p>How shall we allocate building resources to achieve success?</p>
Superintendent		<p>Are our programs of instruction producing desired results?</p> <p>Is each building producing results?</p> <p>Which schools need additional resources?</p> <p>How shall we allocate district resources to achieve success?</p>

Table 2.3 (Continued)

Assessment User	Assessment <i>for</i> Learning	Assessment <i>of</i> Learning
State Department of Education		Are programs across the state producing results? Are individual districts producing results? Who is making adequate yearly progress and is not? How shall we allocate district resources to achieve success?
Citizens		Are our students achieving in ways that prepare them to become productive workers and citizens?

Source: Adapted from *Student-Involved Assessment for Learning*, 4th ed. (p. 22), by R. J. Stiggins, 2005, Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill/Prentice Hall. Copyright © 2005 by Pearson Education, Inc. Adapted by permission of Pearson Education, Inc.

- Students are very important users of assessment information, making critical decisions about themselves as learners. These decisions can have important motivational consequences.
- Individuals make very important decisions about students based on assessment information. Therefore, all our assessments—standardized as well as classroom; assessments *of* learning as well as assessments *for* learning—must be of high quality, yielding accurate results.

You might be thinking assessment *for* and *of* learning sound like formative and summative assessment. If you are, you are correct. Assessment *for* learning is also called “formative” assessment. Assessment *of* learning is also called “summative” assessment. We use here the words *for* and *of* because they are more sprightly and catchy. But, more importantly, the term *assessment for learning* has a broader meaning than formative assessment. The traditional way to think of formative uses of assessment is teachers assessing frequently and using the results to plan the next steps in instruction. Assessment *for* learning goes beyond that. It involves teachers providing descriptive rather than evaluative feedback to students. It also includes students—from clarifying targets to self-assessing to communicating with others about their own progress. It’s this descriptive feedback

and student-involvement aspect of assessment *for* learning that results in the remarkable achievement gains we'll describe in the next section.

If you like the terms “formative” and “summative” better, use them. Just remember to add *descriptive feedback to students* and *student involvement in assessment* to the formative side. For simplicity's sake, we'll occasionally use the words “formative” and “summative.” When we do, we mean “formative” in its broadest sense.

Why the Distinction Is Important

And now the kicker: As it turns out, the distinction between assessment *for* and *of* learning is pivotal to understanding the most effective uses of assessment in the classroom.

Impact of Assessment *for* Learning

Research evidence gathered around the world shows what happens to student achievement when the principles of assessment *for* learning permeate the classroom environment. Dozens of studies conducted at all levels of instruction offer evidence of strong achievement gains in student performance as measured by standardized tests (Bloom, 1984; Black & Wiliam, 1998; Black, 2003; Meisels, Atkins-Burnett, Xue, Bickel, & Hon, 2003; Rodriguiz, 2004). The effect of assessment *for* learning on student achievement is some four to five times greater than the effect of reduced class size (Ehrenberg, Brewer, Gamoran, & Willms, 2001). Few interventions in education come close to having the same level of impact as assessment *for* learning.

But the most intriguing result is that, while all students show achievement gains, the largest gains accrue to the lowest achievers. Everyone wins, with those who have the most to win, winning the most.

We're used to thinking about assessment as the measurer of impact of instructional interventions; we implement a new program or teaching strategy and then use assessment to see how effective it was. *In the case of assessment for learning, assessment becomes not only the measurer of impact, but also the innovation that causes change in student achievement; assessment is not just the index of change, it is the change.*

Black and Wiliam (1998) identify the classroom assessment features that bring about these large achievement gains:

- Assessments that result in accurate information
- Descriptive rather than evaluative feedback to students
- Student involvement in assessment

And so, as you might guess, these are the assessment practices we emphasize in this book. *Accuracy + descriptive feedback + student involvement = achievement gains.*

Assessment and Student Motivation

The reason assessment *for* learning practices yield large achievement gains can best be explained by examining their critical link to student motivation.

How do we use assessment to help students *want* to learn? Our traditional way has been to use assessments *of* learning (for example, grades) to reward behavior we feel leads to learning—doing homework and getting it in on time, preparing for class discussions, participating in class discussions, trying hard, and so on—and punish behavior we feel doesn't lead to learning—not doing homework or getting it in on time, not being prepared for class, not participating in class discussions, not trying. We have factored behavior into grades to motivate students to act in academically responsible ways.

Reflect for a moment on this procedure. Can you identify students for whom promising As and threatening Fs works? It causes them to work hard, get assignments in on time, and learn well? Of course you can. By the same token, can you identify students who are impervious to the threat of failure? For whom grades have ceased to be a motivator at all? Again, you may know one or many such students. Our traditional ways of using assessment to motivate students to want to keep trying—the rewards and punishments of grades—often don't work as we hope they will.

Recent thinking reconfigures ways in which assessment can motivate students to want to learn. According to those who study the human brain (see, for example, Caine & Caine, 1997; Jensen, 1998), we all have an innate desire to learn; we are born with intrinsic motivation. Learning is required for survival. The brain is built to seek information, integrate it with other information, interpret it, remember it, and bring it to bear at the appropriate