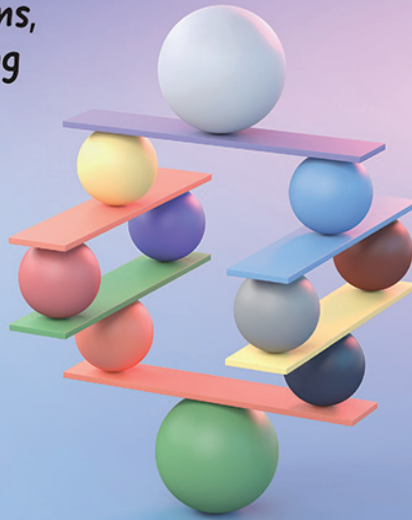


Student ASSESSMENT

Better *Evidence*,
Better *Decisions*,
Better *Learning*



Dylan Wiliam
Douglas Fisher
Nancy Frey

CORWIN
Fisher & Frey

Thank you

FOR YOUR
INTEREST IN
CORWIN

Please enjoy this complimentary excerpt from
Student Assessment by Dylan Wiliam, Douglas
Fisher, and Nancy Frey.

LEARN MORE about this title!

CORWIN

INTRODUCTION

Assessment provides the link between teaching and learning. As such, it should be part of every lesson that teachers plan. In particular, educators need to analyze assessment evidence to gauge students' learning—what is known already, what has been fully learned, what is only partially understood, and where errors and misconceptions stubbornly remain—and to celebrate the discovery of student mastery. Robust assessment systems allow teachers to make informed decisions about the impact of lessons and to adjust the students' future learning experiences based on that evidence. Let's look at two examples of classroom assessment practices to see the positive impact effective assessment can have on students of all ages.

In this example, the two classes are at the same middle school, but they might as well be on different planets. On the surface the classes seem comparable: Both are led by experienced and caring teachers. The teachers' interactions with students are warm and inviting. The educators both utilize good curriculum materials and present well-organized and engaging lessons. They both check for understanding, invite student responses, and use exit slips. Yet the students perform academically in significantly different ways, even though the students in both classes are academically and socially similar. Let's see why.

In the lower-performing class, the teacher focuses on covering content. Students receive grades for attendance, projects, and homework. In addition, quizzes are scored automatically by the learning management system, and tests are adopted from a commercially available system. Evaluations of student learning are administered only one time, and students do not have the opportunity to correct them, analyze errors, or improve on their initial attempts. It's "one and done" in this class.

In the higher-performing classroom, the teacher views assessment as the engine of learning. The teacher uses assessments not only as ways to learn more about the students but also as tools to help students learn.

STUDENT ASSESSMENT

This teacher provides students with opportunities to complete the quizzes and tests along with the projects by following this approach:

- Students analyze their own performance, noting their success and their errors.
- The teacher directs them to review materials in order to correct their errors and undertake the next best set of learning challenges.
- In partnership, the teacher and students transform these self-assessments into learning goals.
- To accomplish their goals, students engage in additional study, often outside of the school day, to deepen their understanding.

As part of this assessment approach, students know that the quizzes and practice tests are not used in their grades, but rather serve as opportunities to consolidate their learning and to determine what additional learning they need. Instead, their grades are based on summaries of their learning, which they record and share with the teacher, as well as on the projects they complete.

Perhaps most importantly, the teacher in the high-performing class uses a competency-based system to evaluate students' learning. Grades are based on students' demonstration of mastery on assessments, and not other factors such as attendance, participation, or bringing supplies to class. When teachers make success criteria transparent to students as they start a series of lessons, students are more likely to understand what they need to do to be successful. These tools also help students decide whether they have reached the desired levels of mastery. Students who do not earn a passing grade of (say) 70 percent receive an "Incomplete" mark rather than a failing grade. Consequently, the students in this class have learned that it is essential to master each part of the curriculum, not simply hope that the law of averages will result in a passing grade for the course.

In some ways, this approach is more work for the teacher, who must prepare multiple forms of various assessments. In addition, students with "Incomplete" marks must successfully complete review materials tailored to the concepts underlying the items they missed before they can take a new version of the assessment. But the results are astounding. In the second class, the students' learning—as measured by a summative evaluation developed by the school system—is much stronger than the knowledge gained by their peers in the first class. In the second class, the students actually learned from their experiences with assessments. Although this example involved two middle school classes,

this general approach to assessment is effective with students in younger and older grades as well.

ASSESSMENT AS A DRIVER OF LEARNING

This book addresses a fundamental aspect of the teaching and learning process: assessment. We attempt to answer a question that has existed in our profession for decades: *How do we know our students are learning?* For example, Ralph Tyler (1949) noted that there are two questions that teachers need to address:

- What do I want students to learn?
- What evidence would I accept to verify their learning?

The tools we have at our disposal have evolved over the years, and now there are newer methods that teachers can use to answer the second question. But the question remains: How do we know that the information is accurate and meaningful? And this challenge requires more than considering just how the assessments are constructed; it also requires taking into account the authenticity of the students' responses.

Various assessment methods that are commonly used by educators to evaluate student learning include the following:

1. **Tests and exams.** This is a traditional method of assessment that involves administering written or online tests and exams to evaluate students' understanding of subject matter.
2. **Assignments and projects.** This involves giving students tasks to complete, such as essays, research papers, presentations, or other projects that require critical thinking, problem solving, and application of knowledge.
3. **Quizzes.** This involves administering short, low-stakes assessments to gauge students' understanding and identify areas that require further review or instruction.
4. **Portfolios.** This is a collection of students' work over time that demonstrates their learning progress and achievements in a particular subject or field.
5. **Performance assessments.** This involves observing students as they complete a task, such as a lab experiment or a presentation,

to evaluate their skills, knowledge, and understanding of the subject matter.

- 6. Self-assessment and peer evaluation.** This involves having students assess their own learning progress or evaluate their peers' work, which can promote reflection, collaboration, and feedback.

The choice of assessment method often depends on the learning goals, the subject matter, and the students' needs and abilities. A combination of different assessment methods can provide a more comprehensive and accurate picture of student learning.

With that in mind, it's essential to acknowledge a major challenge we now face as educators: identifying and then assessing what content the students or other authors have actually produced independently to ensure that our students' learning goes beyond the oftentimes shallow level of artificial intelligence. This applies not only to the content they create but also the content they rely on for sources. To provide you with a real-time example of this challenge, we actually used AI technology to produce the previous section of narration and list of assessments:

Various assessment methods that are commonly used by educators to evaluate student learning include the following . . . A combination of different assessment methods can provide a more comprehensive and accurate picture of student learning.

In this case, we asked ChatGPT a simple question—"How do you assess student learning?"—and within seconds, it generated the response you just read. This synthetic text is a bit superficial, perhaps, but it certainly looks "real."

From here on out, we won't be using artificial intelligence in this book, but as you've now experienced, this example highlights an additional challenge teachers now face with accurately and authentically determining what their students have learned. As we will explore throughout this book, there isn't really any difference between a quiz and a test, apart from the stakes attached to the outcomes, and if there is a useful distinction to be made between a test and an examination, we haven't come across it. Performance assessments are one kind of project or assignment, where the focus is on assessing competence directly, rather than by proxies such as multiple-choice questions. And tests, exams, quizzes, projects, and assignments could be assessed by the teacher, the learner, or by their peers.

To add value in a world where tools such as ChatGPT are a part of everyday life, our students need to be able to go beyond surface features and gain deep insights into what they are studying. Consequently, as educators, we need to know whether they can analyze, synthesize, adapt, critique, and create. In other words, our assessments also need to evolve.

In the next chapter, we focus on the question *Why assess?* From there, we argue that there is a need for a new assessment model. Rather than relying on the common approach of data-driven decision making, the future requires decision-driven data collection. From there, we focus on several tools that educators can use to collect better evidence so that they can make better decisions and thus ensure better learning for students. In the closing chapters, we propose that schools need a more coherent approach to collecting and interpreting evidence, and we suggest some effective ways in which this might be achieved.

Takeaways

- Assessment information allows teachers to make decisions about where students need to go next in the learning process.
- There are several types of assessment that are useful in making decisions.
- Educators need to be aware of new threats to the usefulness of the assessment evidence that teachers collect.
- Assessments link the teaching and learning and thus are powerful tools teachers have to accelerate learning.