

Introduction

Assessment is the link between teaching and learning. As such, assessment should be part of every lesson that teachers plan, distance or otherwise. In particular, assessment data should be analyzed to gauge what is known already, what has been fully learned, what is only partially understood, and where errors and misconceptions stubbornly remain, and to enjoy the discovery of student mastery. Robust assessment systems allow teachers to make informed decisions about their impact and to adjust the learning experiences of students based on the evidence they collect. In essence, assessments provide teachers an opportunity to be an evaluator of their impact and can guide the future instruction that students experience. Consider the following two classes in middle school (and we recognize that you don't all teach middle school):

These two classes are at the same school, but they might as well be on different planets. On the surface they seem comparable; both are led by experienced and caring teachers. Their interactions with students during synchronous meetings are warm and inviting. They each utilize good curriculum materials and both present organized and engaging lessons. They both check for understanding, invite chat responses, and use hand signals. Yet the students perform academically in significantly different ways, despite the fact that the students in both classes are academically and socially similar. In the lower performing class, the teacher focuses on covering content. Students receive grades for 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.

But in the higher-performing classroom, the teacher views assessment as the engine of learning. Assessments are used for learning and as learning tools. This teacher provides students opportunities to complete the quizzes and tests, along with the projects, but students are tasked with analyzing their own performance, their success, and their errors and are directed to review materials in order to correct them and undertake the next best set of learning challenges. These self-assessments are transformed into goals established in partnership with the teacher. To accomplish their goals, students engage in additional study, often asynchronously, to deepen their understanding. They know that the quizzes and practice tests are not used in their grades, but rather as opportunities to determine additional learning needed. Instead, their grades are based on summaries of their learning that are recorded and shared 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. When teachers make success criteria transparent to students as they start a series of lessons, these help establish the criteria of success, the desired levels of mastery. Students who do not



Vince Bustamante introduces *The Assessment Playbook for Distance and Blended Learning*.

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earn a passing grade of (say) 70 percent receive an Incomplete rather than a failing grade. 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 is more work for the teacher, who must prepare multiple forms of an assessment. In addition, students with Incompletes 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. The learning of students in the second class, measured by a summative evaluation developed by the school system and administered to all students in the course, is much better than those in the first one. They actually learned from their experiences with assessments.

Teachers should determine their impact on students' learning, and a variety of assessment tools can help them do so. In this book, we provide a wide range of assessment tools that you can use to determine students' learning (and your impact) and then use that information in your decision-making, whether that be for future instruction or for determining impact and grades. The examples come from distance and blended learning but have implications for all classrooms. A positive is that the pandemic has allowed teachers to rethink assessment and develop new tools that inform their work.

In the first section of this book, *Assessment Cookies*, we focus on some enduring aspects of assessment from a distance. This section includes the following:

**THE CHALLENGE
WE FACE NOW
IS IN DESIGNING
ASSESSMENTS THAT
APPROPRIATELY
MEASURE AND
TARGET STUDENT
LEARNING BOTH IN
FACE-TO-FACE AND
DISTANCE LEARNING
ENVIRONMENTS.**

1. Assessment is difficult because it is important.
2. Assessments come in all shapes and sizes.
3. Know the learner and their learning journey.
4. Assess that which has been taught and teach based on the standards.
5. Students deserve to know what they should be learning.
6. Knowing your destination helps.
7. Everything is searchable, so plan accordingly.
8. Parents want to help and sometimes it's problematic.

Remember, if the assessment does not help the teacher learn about their impact, then it needs to change.

The second section of this book, *The Playlists*, focuses on your assessment tools that we have organized into a playlist of sorts. This section includes

1. Universal response
2. Teach-back opportunities
3. Composing
4. Self-assessment and peer assessment

The final section of this book focuses on upgrading your assessments and thinking like an evaluator. In this final section, we'll focus on the use of more formal tools that can be used to document learning for reporting purposes. We will consider characteristics of longer essays, tests, and performance tasks that are commonly used to determine proficiency, competency, or mastery of learning. We include performance assessments, ipsative assessments (what a cool word, right? Are you excited to learn more?), confirmative assessments, and thinking like an evaluator.



Students in high-performing classrooms are tasked with analyzing their own performance, their successes, and their errors.