

Student Assessment

There are many ways to assess the growth and competency of your students. The following pages list and describe a variety of techniques and provide supporting forms to utilize them in your classroom.

❖ Observation

Observation, when it is done really well, allows for immediate intervention. Small groups can be called together for instant mini-lessons on important concepts. Partners can be refocused on the task at hand. An individual student can be guided in the right direction with none of the wasted time that goes with the teacher's finding a mistake on the paper, circling it in red, passing it back, and hoping that the student will look at it before stuffing it into a backpack or worse, into the wastepaper basket.

Recording this kind of observation can become a major problem, however. Many experts recommend anecdotal records. Others have good things to say about checklists and other kinds of forms. Some teachers carry notebooks or cards on clipboards. Others just try to remember everything until after school and then make notes to drop into portfolios. Teachers who are lucky enough to have classroom aides depend on them to make notes. Whatever the system, the observation must be recorded, or it cannot become part of the assessment.

❖ Conferencing

Conferencing is another part of assessment. Conferences can be formal or informal, planned or spur-of-the-moment. The teacher uses this time to review and to analyze what the student has been doing and to help plan and implement the next steps in the student's learning.

Recording the results of a conference is much easier, of course, than recording observations. The teacher can be prepared with a form or some other system, and the student can help with the process. Moreover, the student's perspective is also considered, giving the conference somewhat greater scope than the observation.

❖ The Writing Process

The writing process makes up an important part of effective assessment. The multiple drafts that result from this process of self-editing, peer editing, teacher editing, revising, and polishing provide a ready-made record of student progress. (See page 348 for more information about the writing process.)

❖ Self-Evaluation

Journal entries, reading records, checklists, completed questionnaires, and the students' written reflections on their own work are also useful in tracking a student's progress. They are part of the self-evaluation aspect of assessment in which students are asked to rate their own progress and to take ownership of and responsibility for the process as well as the results.

Student Assessment (cont.)

❖ Paper-and-Pencil Tests

Traditional paper-and-pencil tests are still popular forms of assessment, even though experts warn that they can be artificial and limiting. Teachers are encouraged to make these tests as relevant to the actual activity of the classroom as they possibly can. Open-ended questions can be constructed, together with appropriate scoring rubrics, so that the assessment reflects what the students are really doing.

❖ Standardized Tests

Traditional paper-and-pencil tests also perform the function of getting students ready for the district-mandated, standardized tests. Even though many experts agree that the results of standardized testing are not meaningful or relevant and provide a limited or even false picture of what students are learning, standardized testing is alive and well within nearly every school district, and the public consistently uses the results as a barometer of student and school success.

A great deal is being written about helping both teachers and students to cope with the pressures of this kind of testing. It is interesting to note that there is a strong movement to create some kind of national standardized test at the same time as many educators are questioning the validity of this kind of testing at all.

There is, of course, no difficulty in recording the results of paper-and-pencil or standardized testing. The teacher simply places the corrected test or score sheet (or a photo copy) in the student's assessment portfolio. (See page 236 for more on portfolios.) The simplicity of the recording process and the clarity of the results are likely what perpetuate the use of this kind of assessment.

❖ Requirements

In summary, the best assessment requires authenticity, relevance, and the concentrated involvement of both teacher and student. Some incremental parts of the process are observation, conferencing, the use of the writing process, and self-evaluation, as well as traditional paper-and-pencil tests and standardized testing.

