

Philosophy of Assessment

As a child, my parents rewarded my brother and me for good grades by paying us X amount of dollars for As and Y amount of dollars for Bs. The only value I saw grades had a dollar sign attached to it. Grades meant less and less to me as I continued through school and took my share of “easy A” classes and got extra credit for things like volunteering for fundraisers and having perfect attendance. In my mind grades did not indicate learning the content, but rather learning the teacher and how to make it through his or her class with the least resistance and best grade possible. This went on until I took “College Writing II.” I was required to take the class, but I was sure that it would be a breeze. I loved writing. Teachers had told me that I excelled in writing. I turned in my first paper. The next week it was handed back to me with a “C-” scrawled across the top. I was shocked. I paged through looking for red marks and analyzed the rubric stapled to the essay. For one of the first times in my life, I really cared why I had received the grade that I had.

This class turned me on my head. I have never worked so hard for a class. The way that my professor assessed the work, provided feedback, encouraged revision, and allowed for improvement was incredibly motivating and led to some of the most significant learning that I have done in a single class. My success was rooted in my teacher’s assessment. This concept shapes the way that I consider the role and value of assessment in my own classroom. To me, the primary focus of assessment is improving the teacher’s teaching and the learner’s learning. Assessment is not simply an end, but also, a means.

Assessment functions as a means particularly when it is formative. Formative assessment is a mixture of formal and informal assessment that occur concurrently with

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instruction. Through worksheets, exit tickets, quizzes, etc. the teacher can see exactly where his or her students are at in relation to the content and then modify his or her style of teaching, the activities included in a lesson, daily objectives, timeframe for instruction or homework requirements to best suit the students' needs. Formative assessment, particularly when through a variety of forms is an excellent ongoing picture of student ability. On the teacher's part, effective use of formative assessment requires adaptability. Teachers need to not only perform these assessments but then use the results to constantly inform and reshape their teaching.

Learning is an ongoing process, but there is a need for summative assessment. Parents, teachers, administrators, and students need a definitive answer to whether or not students have a handle on the material to make a variety of decisions. Summative assessment is the answer; it is the formal assessment that comes after instruction, usually in the form of a test or project. Even as a final measure, it should also inform the teachers decision for the next unit, the next activity, or the next year.

I firmly support standards-based grading. It holds the teachers accountable in helping students to develop a broad base of skills in every content area. Standards-based grading also brings about greater consistency in the value and meaning of grades, because it requires objective measuring of student ability, without leaving significant room for subjectivity. I hope to work at a school that used standard-based grading, because I believe that it is a more authentic expression of student progress and ability. In a school with a traditional grade reporting system, my grading would focus on a limited number of summative assessments. Formative assessment will be a key aspect of my approach to

instruction, it will not appear in my gradebook. I do not want to be bogged down by trying to assign a letter grade to every piece of paper in front of me or trying to figure out a balance between grading work ethic and academics. The grades I give my students will be objective indicators of academic ability alone. Because the ultimate goal of school is learning, I will not put a timeframe on when this process occurs. I will encourage students to adhere to deadlines and keep up with course work, but will not penalize lateness and will allow students to re-do and re-take homework, quizzes, projects, and tests. I would rather my students learn late than never. Students will always have the opportunity to demonstrate their abilities.

For any constructed-response items that will be formally assessed such as projects and papers, I will create an analytic rubric, with each of the criteria being taken directly from a state standard. These rubrics will operate on a four point scale (with a zero option if element is not present): Exceeds Standard, Meets Standard, Partially Meets Standard, and Does Not Meet Standard. The rubric will be written in such a way that the expectations for student work are clearly described to make both the student's work focus and the teacher's grading straightforward. If this score needs to be translated into a letter grade, I would average the students' scores for each of the rubric criteria to get a number between zero and four and determine a letter grade based on the following scale:

A = 3.21-4.0

B = 2.41-3.2

C = 1.61-2.4

D = 0.81-1.6

F = 0.0-0.8

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Both formative and summative assessment play a critical role in the learning process. Assessment provides diagnostic feedback about students, helps educators to set and meet standards, is a means of evaluating student progress, and can also motivate student performance. I want my classroom assessment to be meaningful and my assignments to be valuable. I want to improve my teaching and my student's learning. Ultimately, I hope that the truth I discovered in my "College Writing II" class will continue to hold up. That is, that my student's success will be rooted in my assessment.