

1

Examining the Many Purposes of Assessment

How can I be sure that my students learn what I am teaching and what they are supposed to be learning? How can I involve students in their own growth and understanding? What kinds of tests should I be giving? How do I construct a test? How often should I give tests? What if my students do not do well? What if I don't like giving tests? Do I have other choices? And what do my comments on daily work and tests actually mean to my students? What do my assessments tell me about my teaching?

Do these questions sound familiar to you? Inquiries like these questions challenge most teachers, and like them, you may not feel adequately prepared to assess your learners. You tend to spend most of your time reviewing your content, perfecting your teaching strategies, and collecting resource materials. Then, as you get ready to put it all into action, you realize that your assessments need attention.

As an elementary school teacher, you want to develop the most valuable activities and successful assignments so your young students actively engage in the learning, easily connect new learning to their personal lives, and eagerly generate appropriate evidence showing that they truly understand or “get it.” Your mission is to check their learning using appropriate performance-based assessments that are purposeful for you and your students.

DEMYSTIFY PERFORMANCE-BASED ASSESSMENTS

Before delving into when, what, and how to assess to answer the questions posed at the start of this chapter, here are 12 general concepts related to assessment that establish a firm foundation. Teachers spend 30 percent to 40 percent, maybe as much as 90 percent, of their time preparing, administering, analyzing, intervening, documenting, and reporting assessments (Campbell & Evans, 2000), so understanding performance-based assessments is critical.

However, experience reveals that many classroom teachers have found both the conversations and the processes related to developing performance-based assessments to be complicated and perplexing. Therefore, some teachers tend to avoid using performance-based assessments, while other teachers have adopted some misconceptions about performance-based assessments. It is important for us to demystify and clarify these ideas early in this text, so that developing performance-based assessments will be easy for you.

Define Performance-Based Assessments

1. *Assessment means much more than just a test.* Every time you check to see if your learners understand or “get it,” you are conducting an assessment. You assess when you observe activities, listen to discussions, read written responses, view drawn illustrations, watch performances, and pay attention to body language. You assess before the learning, during the learning, and after the learning; you assess formally and informally, directly and indirectly, by choice and by chance. You spend most of your teaching time assessing your learners. This text describes many different practices, and the suggestions guide you in using performance-based assessments to improve the learning and, consequently, to enhance the teaching and the schooling.

2. *Almost all assessments are performance-based assessments.* You may have come to believe that only when learners are demonstrating outcomes such as reading aloud, calculating a math problem, conducting a science experiment, giving a speech, or turning a cartwheel that they are involved in performance-based assessments. Asking students to respond to a discussion question, to complete a worksheet, or to take a written test are other viable forms of performance-based assessments that you use frequently. After all, the learners are performing by demonstrating outcomes through speaking and writing.

3. *Assessment involves the learning, the teaching, and the schooling.* During assessment, you are collecting all sorts of feedback and data describing the

effectiveness of everyone involved in the classroom. Learning cannot happen effectively unless teaching and schooling are working effectively too. Assessments do not pertain solely to your classroom and your learners' achievements. When you visualize your classroom, it is essential that you always view assessments holistically within a specific context occurring before, during, and after instruction; happening in your classroom, extending throughout the school, and connecting with the entire community; as viewed by the learners, the learners' families, the teacher, the school administrators, the school community, and the state.

4. *Assessment drives learning, teaching, and schooling.* As you develop your curriculum and design your instruction, you should be asking yourself four vital questions:

- a. What do my learners need and want to *know*?
- b. How should and could my learners *show* what they know?
- c. What should and could my learners *do* and when?
- d. Where will the assessments and feedback tell me to *go* (with my curricular design, instructional practices, resource materials, learning community, individual needs, program organization, and professional development)?

The four key words are *know*, *show*, *do*, and *go*. In the planning process, you decide what to teach, how to teach it, when to teach it, and so forth; you also must decide how your learners will demonstrate or could show you what they have learned all along the way. And from each assessment, you must decide where to go next.

As you teach, ask yourself: *Did I cover everything? Did I include enough depth, breadth, and connections? Were my directions clear? Do the learners understand the reasons for learning? Do I need to reteach any of the curriculum? Do I need to repeat, revise, or rearrange any of the instruction? Are the learners ready to integrate and apply their accomplishments in new and different ways?* You cannot make your next moves without deliberately collecting evidence and carefully analyzing where you are now, before you begin. It is essential that you view assessments holistically, as a shared process with ongoing reflection, inspection, and communication; assessments are not just an end to your learning experience (aka, lesson plans) or unit of learning.

Involve Learning Options and Opportunities

5. *Assessments need to be appropriate and authentic.* When you are checking the learning, you want to use a practice of assessment that best fits the specific learning situation. For example, if you want to elicit

authentic feedback about your learners' spelling abilities, you could give a traditional spelling test listing words in isolation, you could ask your learners to incorporate the words into a description or story that features the words, or you could integrate the words into various parts of the curricular content so your learners use the words in reading, writing, speaking, and listening. The last two suggested practices are the most appropriate and authentic, as they are realistic for learning the words and using them in context to be remembered for future learning and applied for life.

6. *Learners should be given (and should help develop) alternative assessments.* Too often the word *alternative* conveys learning situations with less academic rigor or reduced scholarly expectations developed for learners who have been identified as unable to succeed in the “regular” classroom. In performance-based assessments, *alternative* merely means different ways or other choices and options. Perhaps the assessment would be unique or unusual, but alternative assessments do not entail or require unconventional or scary methods. The ideas offered throughout this text explore how to develop alternative assessments for and with your learners that are appropriate and authentic. When you include your learners, they will be quite impressed and resonate once you give them voice, choice, and a sense of ownership or agency (Bandura, 1989). Giving students voice, choice, and ownership will greatly increase their attendance, engagement, achievement, and completion.

Incorporate Teaching Principles and Practices

7. *Assessments must include salience—that is, assessments must be important and relevant.* The forms of appraisal that you are using and the types of information that you are seeking should match the learning and learners, the teaching and teacher, and the curriculum and context. You want to develop assessments that you can describe as the best investment of everyone's time and energy. Try to avoid conducting assessments just to gather and record data because you presume you should. Your learners (and their families) need to know why, when, how, and on what learners will be assessed *before* you begin the instruction. Your forms of appraisal must be germane to the content and processes; the outcomes must be significant for the learning to be recognized now, integrated later, and used throughout life.

8. *Assessments must include validity—that is, assessments must be suitable and applicable.* Again, it is all about a justified fit. You must be able to defend how the selected form of appraisal will elicit a particular type of information. At some point, a student, parent, colleague, and/or

administrator will ask you to explain your choices based on legitimate purposes and detailed procedures. And you want to be sure your learners can demonstrate proficiency with the content and processes in ways that are developmentally appropriate and rightfully showcase their accomplishments and achievements.

9. *Assessments must include reliability—that is, assessments must be dependable and consistent.* To be reliable means you can count on the assessment every time you use it to give constant results. You want to be able to explain the significance or why this assessment is the most effective and efficient. Once you begin teaching, most likely you will create a group of 5 to 10 forms of appraisal probing 5 to 10 types of information that you will use almost every time you assess your learners. Your learners (and their families) will appreciate consistency in your practices of assessment, and you can refine and expand your routine with time and experience.

10. *Assessments must include fidelity—that is, assessments must be understandable and objective.* Fidelity ensures the purpose(s) of your assessments. Your assessments must be planned, prepared, and conducted so that you and your learners clearly comprehend what is being assessed, how it will be assessed, and why it is being assessed. In order for your assessments to be effective, you must attend to the clarity and fairness of your communications in the directions and questions on the assessments followed by the feedback and scoring after the assessments.

11. *Assessments must include robustness—that is, assessments must be deliberate and mindful of depth, breadth, and opportunity.* Assessments should be long enough to cover the subject yet short enough to be interesting. Students must be allowed to provide adequate evidence of their learning with assorted ways of expressing their knowledge, skills, and dispositions. You want your assessments to serve as the capstone to the immediate learning and to provide the connection to the next adventure.

12. *Assessment must include expectations.* You need to determine through narrative description, checklist, percentage, and so forth, the levels of proficiency that are satisfactory and unsatisfactory for each assessment. You have to decide in advance of the assessment, scoring, and feedback if and how learners will have demonstrated mastery of each objective.

Assessments are easy to understand and to apply in both concept and practice. By aligning your curriculum and instruction with the assessment, you will find that the learning, your teaching, and the schooling will make much more sense to your learners, their families, you, and your administrators. Now your assessments are positive, productive, and practical.

Table 1.1 12 Basic Concepts About Performance-Based Assessments

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Assessment means much more than just a test. 2. Almost all assessments are performance-based assessments. 3. Assessment involves the learning, the teaching, and the schooling. 4. Assessment drives the learning, teaching, and schooling. 5. Assessments need to be appropriate and authentic. 6. Learners should be given (and should help develop) alternative assessments to ensure learner voice, choice, and ownership (agency). 7. Assessments must include salience—that is, they are important and relevant. Salience relates to the description: What assessments match the content and processes? 8. Assessments must include validity—that is, they are suitable and applicable. Validity relates to the justification: How do these assessments showcase the learners and learning? 9. Assessments must include reliability—that is, they are dependable and consistent. Reliability relates to the significance: Why are these assessments effective for the teacher and teaching? 10. Assessments must include fidelity—that is, they are understandable and objective. Fidelity relates to the purpose: Do these assessments communicate clearly and fairly? 11. Assessments must include robustness—that is, they are deliberate and mindful of depth, breadth, and opportunity. Robustness relates to richness: Do these assessments allow learners to provide adequate evidence of their learning? 12. Assessments must include expectations that are prepared in advance to determine multiple levels of proficiency for each objective.

What more could you want? Plus your classroom will become more alive and engaging; and you will enjoy your work much more.

Table 1.1 recaps the 12 concepts about performance-based assessments. As a quick preassessment to check your entry-level awareness about assessments, examine your thinking related to each concept. Do you agree? How do you incorporate these concepts into your practices?

UNDERSTAND THE SIX COMPONENTS OF ASSESSMENT

Since performance-based assessments drive the learning, the teaching, and the schooling, they operate in a unified balance that includes the following six interconnected components:

1. Each learner's individuality and background
2. Each learner's prior knowledge and experiences as part of the group of learners with constructed knowledge and shared experiences
3. The teacher's (your) expertise and expectations
4. The teacher's (your) organization and readiness
5. The curricular content and academic standards, and
6. The learning community context

These six components provide you with valuable information that unlock the secrets to your learners' achievement and your own success during your preassessments, formative assessments, and summative assessments. Figure 1.1 provides a frame for the overall assessment process.

Figure 1.1 Six Components of Assessment



Know Your Learners

In Assessment Component 1, you focus on each learner's individuality and background. You want to know all you can about your students, both individually and as members of various groups. You want to familiarize

yourself with their cultural backgrounds, personal interests, and learning styles. This component might seem like the most obvious one for teachers to understand. Ask yourself: *How can my students learn effectively and efficiently unless I know them as individual people?* However, too often teachers focus more on themselves and on the curricular content than on their learners as individuals, almost as if they were teaching in a vacuum.

For example, if you are teaching about nutrition, you want to discover the kinds of foods that your learners eat, the kinds of foods they like (and dislike), and the methods they prefer for investigating unknown foods, such as smelling, touching, and tasting different kinds of foods. Effective teachers become acquainted with their learners as unique people. You and your learners will enjoy delving into getting to know one another as individuals.

Assessment Component 1 works closely with Assessment Component 2. Now you focus on each learner's prior knowledge and experiences. You want to find out the content and processes each student has already learned and the various ways the students have either applied or connected the learning to prior learning in this content area, other content, and the world around each one of them. Getting to know your students academically extends into the constructed knowledge and shared experiences that have occurred within prior classroom learning. Ask yourself: *How can my students learn effectively and efficiently unless I know them as individual learners?*

For example, if you are teaching your students about proper nouns, you want to explore and recognize the kinds of learners they are, that is, English language learners (ELL), gifted and talented learners (G/T), special education learners (SPED), and so forth. If the learners are new to you, you can read the learners' cumulative files, talk with their former teachers, engage in conversations with the learners, and give your learners various opportunities to produce and share brief writing samples.

Effective teachers tend to pursue all four of these assessment practices. Then, continuing our example, you want to investigate your learners' knowledge and experiences with proper nouns. This is the time to conduct a quick KWHL, asking the learners what they *Know*, what they *Wonder*, ways they will confirm *How* they learn, and what they would like to *Learn* next. You can preassess using the KWHL strategy as a formal or informal class conversation with or without writing. Organizing your preassessments is your choice and should fit your purposes.

Reflect on Your Practices

Some teachers spend disproportionately large amounts of time and energy on Assessment Components 3 and 4: the teachers' own expertise and expectations paired with the teachers' organization and readiness.

Teachers tend to teach what they know, what they can do, and what they want to teach rather than focusing on the learners as people with personal interests and learners with prior knowledge and experiences. Ask yourself: *How can my students learn effectively and efficiently if I am overly concerned with my own expertise and readiness?*

Likewise, many teachers place too much emphasis on Assessment Component 5: curricular content and academic standards. Responsibly, each teacher should refer to the student learning expectations guiding the state and school district. However, many teachers teach *to* the standards and assess the learning expectations almost exclusively of or away from the students and their individual accomplishments. Regrettably, the learning may be taught in isolation and not integrated across the curriculum; the learning may not relate to the lives of the students and/or the real world. When these events occur, many students fail to retain the learning, apply it appropriately at a later time, or appreciate its contributions to our world. Ask yourself: *How can my students learn effectively and efficiently if I concentrate exclusively on the state standards?*

Assessment Component 6, the learning community context, emphasizes connections between and among the learners, the teaching, and the world—near and far; yesterday, today, and tomorrow. You will teach many different topics and issues that will be new and different to your learners (and perhaps new and different to you too). In order for your learners to use the vocabulary, understand the concepts, and apply the practices, you have to make meaningful connections and model the joy of learning.

That means that you place the learning experiences or units of learning within a learning community context. Your students will gain much more understanding and apply the learning much more quickly and authentically when you put the learning into an environment and situation enriched with multiple perspectives; then the learners can identify and apply it to their own contemporary lives. Ask yourself: *How can my students learn effectively and efficiently unless I create an inviting, exciting, and igniting sense of place?* Unfortunately, many teachers overlook the value of a learner-centered learning community context when assessing their students.

Clarify Responsibilities for Recording Learner Progress

The responsibilities for recording learner progress can be discussed using three different terms: *assessment*, *evaluation*, and *accountability*. Unfortunately, many educators use these three terms interchangeably, showing their newness and discomfort with performance-based

assessments. While the concepts are closely related, each word describes a distinctly different responsibility necessary for recording learner progress and achievement. It is helpful to establish the definition of each word and to describe it thoroughly so you can discern and apply its individual meaning and usefulness.

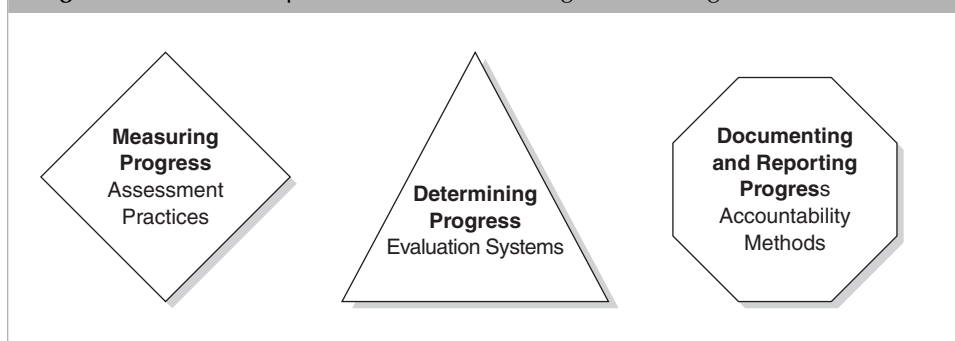
Assessment: Collecting evidence for measuring understanding of and progress toward learning short-term or immediate objectives

Evaluation: Analyzing and deciding the degree to which learners have achieved understanding and have mastered proficiency of long-term outcomes toward learning goals

Accountability: Documenting results and communicating accomplishments; recording and reporting findings to others

Each responsibility for recording learner progress fulfills unique tasks for measuring, determining, and reporting learners' outcomes and achievements. Yet the three responsibilities operate holistically, so it does not matter where you start your thinking about the three responsibilities. You may want to focus on the methods of accountability, then move to systems of evaluations, and return to your practices of assessments. As you concentrate on your practices of assessments, simultaneously you want to think about your systems of evaluations and methods of accountability. You cannot accomplish any of the three responsibilities without involving the other two responsibilities of learner achievement as reflected by your assessment practices, evaluation systems, and accountability methods. You can remember the three responsibilities as they are shown in Figure 1.2.

Figure 1.2 Three Responsibilities for Recording Learner Progress



A diamond represents your assessment practices; you strive for each of your learners to shine. Plus a diamond has four sides, noting the four stages of your assessment practices: (1) as you plan, (2) before the learning, (3) during the learning, and (4) after the learning. A triangle represents your evaluation systems. The purpose of assessment is to provide feedback relative to the three sides of the triangle: (1) the learners and learning, (2) the teacher and teaching, and (3) the learning experience and environment corresponding to the six components of assessment. A hexagon, the shape of a stop sign, represents your accountability methods. You are the final stop for maintaining documents and reporting progress to students, families, and administrators.

PICTURE THE CONTINUOUS FLOW OF ASSESSMENT

We now know that assessment means collecting evidence of progress. Assessment encompasses a continuous flow of practices that occur before, during, after, and long after the learning and teaching. Stakeholders include the teacher, the learners in the classroom, and everyone outside the classroom, such as families, administrators, community members, and so forth. Information or data gathered from assessments should inform the teacher about all six components of assessment.

Most teachers, learners, and parents think of assessments primarily as pencil-and-paper tests. However, written assessments certainly can be constructed in many different ways and definitely play important roles in assessment practices (O'Malley & Valdez Pierce, 1996). Some teachers think that performance-based assessments include only activities during which learners do something to demonstrate or show their achievement, such as giving a speech, writing a story, calculating a math problem, conducting a science experiment, or navigating a computer program. Sometimes performance-based assessments are called "alternative assessments," indicating that they are not the usual, normal, or frequently used assessments. Alternative assessments may be viewed as not being as accurate or important for evaluating final outcomes.

Therefore, there are three main points to keep in mind about assessments when you picture the continuous flow of assessment:

1. Nearly every assessment is a performance-based assessment (Stiggins, 2008).

2. Every kind of assessment practice is equally important and should be selected to accomplish complex and significant tasks, to apply to realistic situations, or to solve authentic problems (Herman, Aschbacher, & Winters, 1992).
3. Pencil-and-paper tasks, including tests, may qualify as performance-based assessments that should and must be used, albeit judiciously (Airasian & Miranda, 2002).

Throughout this text, references to performance-based assessments include all varieties of evidence and feedback.

Start With Assessments and Objectives

You will spend most of your time as a teacher assessing in one of three ways: observing, listening, and reading. You are assessing *short-term outcomes* or *immediate objectives*. You can assess a single learning experience or several learning experiences collectively. The key to effective assessment is frequency; you want to assess often so you are sure your students comprehend the immediate knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to continue the learning and make meaningful connections.

You will determine the objectives for each learning experience that you facilitate throughout the school day. Simultaneously, you will be assessing academic as well as behavioral expectations. You will collect evidence, provide feedback, and record progress many times each day. Later chapters in this text equip you with a multitude of strategies to conduct formal and informal assessments as well as offer many cautions to consider throughout the process of assessment, evaluation, and accountability.

As you prepare to assess your learning objectives, it is essential to ensure that salience, validity, reliability, fidelity, and robustness are present in every assessment; think about the 12 basic concepts introduced in the first part of this chapter. Let's consider a learning experience when you are assessing your learners' progress in identifying the main ideas in a written passage. Check for

- **Salience.** Selected passages feature main ideas that are important for learners to know (remember . . . salience describes what).
- **Validity.** Identified main ideas have meaning for the learners and connect with prior learning (validity justifies how).
- **Reliability.** Identified main ideas give you the evidence you are seeking (reliability signifies why).

- Fidelity. Selected passages are readable and meaningful, directions are clear and achievable, feedback to learners is positive and productive (fidelity ensures comprehension and objectivity).
- Robustness. Assessment instrument includes an adequate number and variety of passages to demonstrate proficiency at multiple levels (robustness encompasses breadth, depth, and opportunity).
- Expectations. Descriptive checklists of expectations account for multiple levels of proficiency that may apply to the whole group or to individual learners.

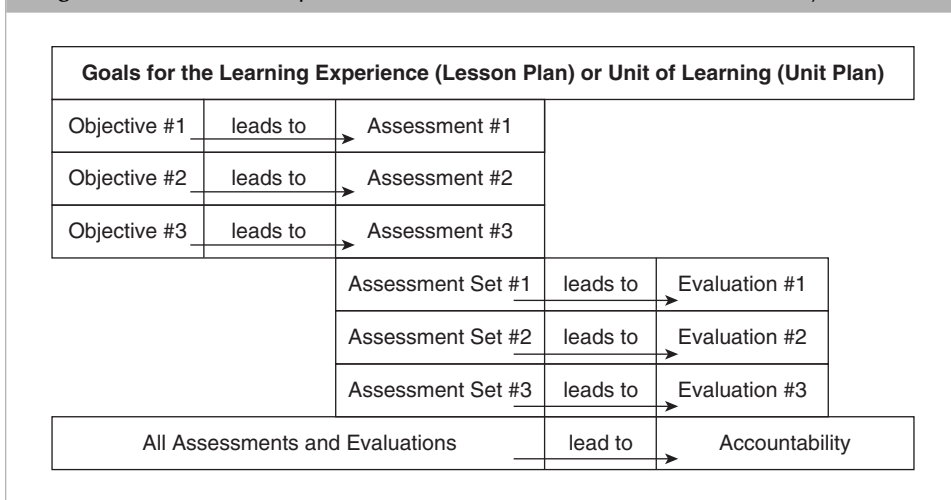
Differentiate Assessment From Evaluation

After you have finished teaching a series of learning experiences, a whole unit of learning, or the entire course of study at the end of the quarter or school year, you conduct an evaluation by analyzing and deciding the degree to which learners have achieved understanding and have mastered proficiency of long-term outcomes toward learning goals.

As you design your curriculum and instruction, *you identify big ideas that you want your learners to take with them into the future*. Big ideas are called *goals*. For example, if you are teaching a unit of learning in math about long division, your objectives for your learners might be to calculate the quotients. You could assess your learners' progress toward fulfilling the objectives daily as your objectives expand from simple division to more complex division problems.

Throughout the unit of learning, you assess your learners' progress frequently. Your assessments match the objectives or short-term outcomes. You could administer written tests with multiple choice, true/false, and calculations. You could ask your learners to show you the process, and/or you could conference with each learner, asking her or him to explain the process orally. Most likely, you will include a combination of assessments. Then you review all of the assessments collected throughout the unit, and you decide, that is, evaluate, if each of your learners fulfilled the goals for the unit.

The goals probably included knowing when or the most important times to divide, recognizing correct and incorrect quotients, completing the steps required to calculate the quotient, and applying the numbers in the quotient to answer the question in a word problem. If your learners have achieved all of the goals, then you can assign a letter grade on some type of report form. During the evaluation process, you review all of the formal and informal assessments that you have collected, and record the results (see Figure 1.3).

Figure 1.3 Relationship of Assessment, Evaluation, and Accountability

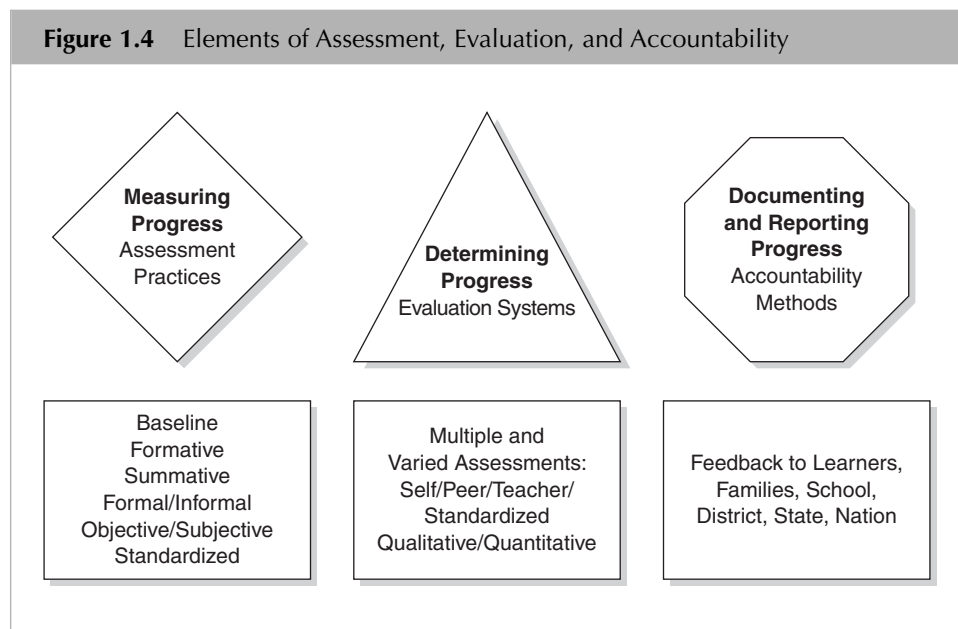
Connect With Accountability

Throughout the assessment and evaluation processes, you record progress and report your findings in various ways. Evaluation is an analysis of an accumulation of many different assessments related to the same topic frequently taught over several weeks, called a “unit of learning.” Evaluations usually become the final grade in a course or the completion of requirements in a particular program or course of study. The purpose of evaluation is to provide feedback relative to the three sides of the triangle (refer back to Figure 1.2).

Once a unit of learning has ended, you need feedback about each of the learners and the learning experiences integral to the unit. You also need to know if you and your teaching were effective and efficient. Not all teachers connect with all learners and vice versa; you want to reflect on your patterns so you can make changes and improvements. Finally, you need feedback about the curriculum and content related to the learning experience, sequence of learning experiences, and the learning environment.

These events lead to accountability. *Accountability refers to documenting results and communicating accomplishments; recording and reporting findings with others.* You will communicate with learners, their families, your colleagues, and your administrators when necessary; plus you will document results in learners’ records. There are many different ways to communicate results of both the assessments and evaluations: on the assessment items, daily or weekly progress report notes, checklists or rubrics, report forms, conferences, telephone calls, e-mail messages, and digital postings. Accountability is explored in greater depth in Chapter 10.

Expanding the graphic organizer on accountability (see Figure 1.4) helps you to make the connections between and among assessments, evaluations, and accountability. This text provides you with all of the vocabulary, concepts, and practices related to performance-based assessments to strengthen the learning, teaching, and schooling. However, you must identify and organize your assessment practices to meet the needs and interests of each learner and the setting. You are also responsible for your accountability to the learners, their families, the school, district, and state, documented in various systems of evaluation. None of your assessments, evaluations, or accountability records will make any sense if you do not consider your particular classroom of learners and the community context first.



The good news is, you can do it! And the guidelines in this text are here to help you. As you prepare for a particular grade level and all your subject areas, simultaneously you need to consider a variety of learning needs and interests. Most likely, you will have learners whose

- Reading and writing abilities range from nonreaders to accomplished readers and writers.
- English-speaking abilities and communication skills range from non-English speakers or hesitant English speakers to refined, articulate English speakers.

- Learning abilities range from learners with various learning disabilities to learners with few or no disabilities, to learners who are gifted and talented and with combinations of abilities.
- Attention span and emotions range from highly distracted to highly focused.
- Knowledge and experiences in all areas of the curriculum range from no background to advanced experiences, multiple applications, and extended connections.
- Cultural diversity and family configurations range in every way possible; family success and interest in school range from marginally absent and pained to highly rewarding and exciting.

As soon as you can get to know your learners, you can begin tailoring your performance-based assessments to your learners, balancing motivation and engagement with the curriculum and instruction.

KNOW THE REASONS FOR SELECTING YOUR ASSESSMENTS . . .

If there is one essential nugget of information to be mined from this chapter, it is the importance of knowing why you are doing what you are doing. First, you select assessments that supply the numbers and tell the stories that you are seeking for ongoing accountability. Second, you develop your year-long curriculum and instruction to show that you are planning the appropriate variety of evidence to substantiate your evaluations. Third, you select the kinds of assessments that invite, ignite, and excite the learning and learners, the teaching and teacher, and the curriculum and community for overall accountability. In these ways, you will be successful in measuring, deciding, and communicating learner achievement.

It may be helpful for you at this time to read the Standards for Teacher Competence in Educational Assessment of Students found in Appendix A.

EXTEND WITH QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Assessment is extremely important. How can I assess my learners properly?

Each teacher develops a unique approach to assessment, evaluation, and accountability. You want to be you. After all, you teach who you are. This text shares many different ideas that you are encouraged to incorporate into your repertoire to enrich your classroom and career, expand your preparation and practices, and enhance your success and satisfaction.

2. Why do teachers use the terms assessment, evaluation, and accountability interchangeably?

Many teachers have not studied performance-based assessments closely and they simply do not realize that the three terms differ in meaning and purpose. You will strengthen your teaching expertise, your learners will demonstrate greater achievement, and your communications with learners and family members will benefit when you clarify the terms and practices.

3. How can I be sure that I know the purposes for my assessment systems, evaluation practices, and accountability methods, and that I am using the right one?

Try some “teacher self-talk.” That means just like it sounds. Pretend you are teaching your learning experience to yourself. Can you clearly identify the assessment, evaluation, and accountability associated with your teaching, learning, and the learning experience? Does each area make sense to you? Here is a little secret: You want your assessment systems, evaluation practices, and accountability methods to be *visible*, *viable*, and *valuable*. That means everyone should be able to see (visible) how you are going to monitor each learner’s progress during and after the learning and check each learner’s outcomes. The assessment systems should be appropriate and practical (viable). And, all assessment systems, evaluation practices, and accountability methods must be important (valuable).

Activities

1. Reflect on your own elementary school learning experiences and the various performance-based assessments that teachers asked you to do. Which ones did you think were appropriate and fair? Why did you feel this way? Then, which assessments did you think were inappropriate and perhaps unfair? Why did you feel this way? Write a few sentences in response to each question.
2. Show a colleague the practices of assessments that you liked and the practices of assessments that you disliked. Discuss the features of each kind.
3. Identify an objective for one learning experience you are planning to teach soon. Connect it to a practice of assessment, then to a system of evaluation, and, finally, to a method of accountability. Are your choices the most effective and efficient ones?
4. Select a unit you are going to teach. Identify examples of feedback and data you would like to collect. Now relate your example with the basic concepts about performance-based assessments to understand the concepts and put them into practice.