

## Using Assessment to Help My Students Succeed

*We have all experienced that moment when we exceed our own expectations and experience the sheer joy of success. Maybe it was the first time you rode your bike without training wheels? Or the time you dove off the diving board into the deep end? Whatever your success, it is cause for celebration because you learned that you are capable even in the face of fear or doubt.*

As teachers, we are in a unique position to help our students experience this rush of success on a continual basis. Through our words and actions, we can empower our students to their fullest potential and this is particularly true in the domain of assessment. It is very important that my students feel good about their abilities, and confident that they can improve in areas requiring more work. That is why my goals for assessment focus on: identifying student strengths as well as weaknesses, setting goals for their future development, improving my practice and encouraging students to take more responsibility for their own learning.

In carrying out assessment at my second grade practicum, I was reminded of all the terms we defined in class, such as *assessment for learning* and *formative feedback*. I knew my approach to assessment would be to encourage my students to demonstrate their best learning. Therefore, when marking their math worksheets, I not only recorded how many each student answered correctly in my grid, but also which questions my students found particularly difficult. This serves two purposes: a) to see how each student was progressing towards the expectations and b) to reveal problem areas so that I could modify my future lessons accordingly.<sup>1</sup> The grid proved very helpful to my teaching as it resulted in a mini lesson with a handful of students who were still struggling to learn time by the half hour. In this way, I was able to review and break down the concepts in a different manner, thereby responding more appropriately to their needs before moving on to my next lessons on time by the quarter hour.

I also used assessment to motivate my students and provide clear feedback on strengths and next steps. When marking their stories about losing a tooth, I wrote thorough responses praising them for what they did well, accompanied by a personalized question seeking more information about something they wrote. By doing this, I was taking to heart what Tompkins meant when she said, “examine what students can do, not just what they can’t do.”<sup>2</sup> Being able to write well is an arduous task and I prefer that my students feel pleased about their writing and realize that I am interested in what they have to say. For my own records, I compiled notes on how each student scored against specific writing skills

criteria. This information was then used to guide my individual conversations with the students to help their writing skills development.

In my next practicum, I will develop ways for students to take even more responsibility for their learning. For those in junior grades and beyond, this means practising self-monitoring and self-evaluation skills. For example, at the beginning of the school year, I will have each student identify the subject areas or skills they found particularly challenging in the previous year. I will teach them about self-evaluation and together as a class we will determine criteria for judging the quality of their work. Finally, I will have students keep portfolios of their work over the school year so that they can also measure and marvel at their own growth and learning.

Thus, it is my belief that the vision of assessment proposed by Earl and Cousins is possible. As a future teacher, I want my students to become life-long learners and I look forward to watching them soar.

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<sup>1</sup>Lorna Earl, *Assessment as Learning: Using Classroom Assessment to Maximize Student Learning* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin, 2003), p. 24.

<sup>2</sup>Gail Tompkins, *Literacy for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: A Balanced Approach* (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Pearson, 2006), p.300.