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**Using Assessments Thoughtfully** Pages 92-93

## Tell Me About ... / The Most Effective Assessment You Have Used

### Student-Response Technology

By using technology for immediate formative assessment, I can give students timely feedback and change lessons on the fly to address student needs. In my 8th grade English language arts classroom, I often use the [Socrative](#) student-response system to ask students multiple-choice or short-answer questions at the beginning of class about the novel they are reading. They can use iPads, laptops, or smartphones to answer the questions; and the program immediately sends me a report with student responses that I can use to address comprehension issues right away. The last time my students took one of these reading check-in quizzes, for example, it showed that almost half of them did not understand how one of the plot events affected the protagonist's characterization. As a result, I changed my lesson for the day to focus on indirect characterization.

—Kate Lewis, 8th grade English language arts teacher, Shrewsbury Public Schools, Massachusetts

### Illustrated Mind Maps

I have my 8th grade social studies students create illustrated mind maps—diagrams that show with pictures what they know about a key concept. For example, to create a mind map of a U.S. Civil War battle, students need to convey all of the information they've learned about that battle with minimal text. (A large key might indicate that the battle was the "key" to victory, a graph representing the number of soldiers might reveal one side's advantage, and so on.)

To create these mind maps, students need to determine what they know and then choose a way to represent the information. Both the process and the product

reveal to me the depth of a student's learning. These assessments can be used formatively throughout a unit—with students adding information as they learn more—and also as a summative assessment at the end.

—*Laura Putinski, curriculum director/teacher, Fairfield Christian Academy, Lancaster, Ohio*

## **A Reflective Essay**

The final exam for my freshman composition students is a reflective essay. Students use examples from their own work during the semester to show how they have grown as writers, how their approach to and attitude about writing have changed, and what writing goals they have for the future. This is, hands-down, the best piece of writing most of them do all semester. I use the results not only to evaluate their readiness to move on in our writing program, but also as valuable feedback for the course itself. Each semester, the course changes in response to the students' comments.

—*Renee Moore, instructor of English, Mississippi Delta Community College, Cleveland, Mississippi*

## **One-on-One Conversations**

In my language arts classroom, the most useful assessment is one-on-one conversations with students about their reading and writing. Working together, students and I set individual learning goals. I use [Evernote](#) to record the conferences and take photos of students' notebooks and work samples. I use the results of these conferences to determine students' progress toward learning targets and to plan instruction based on their needs.

—*Donalyn Miller, 5th grade ELA/SS teacher, Northwest Independent School District, Fort Worth, Texas*

## **Exit Tickets**

The informal use of exit tickets has been a successful method of assessment in my classroom. I have a pocket chart mounted on the wall right next to my classroom door. Each day, students write on an index card a brief reflection about their learning, either in response to a specific prompt from me or on their own. I collect and review the index cards daily. Sometimes I use the information as fodder for the next day's class meeting, and other times I use it to group students by their strengths and challenges for instruction. We keep these exit tickets from month to month to reflect on personal growth throughout the school year.

—*Laura Grayson, teacher, Robinson Elementary, Kirkwood School District, Kirkwood, Missouri*

## **Weekly Check-ins**

At the end of the week, I have each student summarize on a class Google doc what he or she learned relative to the weekly learning goals. I usually showcase selected student answers in class (anonymously of course) and make connections to the new learning for the week. This assessment can show me patterns of misconceptions among students.

—*Andrew Ashcraft, teacher, Metropolitan School District of Wayne Township, Indianapolis, Indiana*

## **Self-Evaluations**

The most effective kind of assessment I use in my classroom is student self-evaluation. If we prepare students by giving them clear instructions about how to reflect on their progress or their completion of a task, they will almost always diagnose their own strengths and weaknesses accurately. Recently, a self-evaluation exercise on a persuasive essay allowed my 9th grade literature students to volunteer comments ranging from the practical ("I need to start wearing my glasses—I can't see the whiteboard and made some mistakes I could have avoided") to the thoughtful ("I found this too easy. I need to work on challenging

myself to use a deeper vocabulary"). Student self-evaluation enables me to see where I need to target reteaching and improve my content or teaching style.

—Liz O'Neill, chair of English, Saint Agnes School, Saint Paul, Minnesota

## An Assess–Plan–Implement Cycle

Across our K–4 schools, we regularly listen to our scholars read, take careful notes of their reading behaviors, have comprehension conversations, and track their fluency rate. With this data in hand, we then discuss what individuals and small groups need if they are to progress as confident and capable readers. Next, we carefully plan our guided reading instruction—the books to use, the standards we'll focus on, the teaching points for each lesson, and how we'll engage our students. This meaningful assess-plan-implement cycle remains a steady piece of our assessment-portfolio.

—Lisa Vahey, model education leader, The Prep Schools, Cleveland, Ohio

## A Self-Reflection Survey

At the end of each unit of instruction, my students complete a survey consisting of two questions: (1) Which assignment/activity did you find most helpful in enhancing your understanding of the major themes of this unit? Why? and (2) Which assignment/activity did you find most difficult? Why? The survey is not only an exercise in metacognition for students, but also an opportunity for me to reflect on my teaching and evaluate the strategies I employed to meet the unit objectives. I have found that students use the survey as an opportunity to tell me how they learn best and what they need help with. I use the feedback from the survey to adjust and plan future units of instruction, share strategies with my colleagues, and track various trends over time.

—Angela Estrella, teacher, Lynbrook High School, San Jose, California

## Individual Reading Conferences

The most informative assessment I've used in my 18-year career as a high school English teacher is the reading conference. As part of our daily 72-minute class period, my students read books of their choice silently for 10–20 minutes. While they're reading, my teaching partner and I alternate days in which one of us confers with individual students outside the classroom while the other stays in the classroom and reads along with the other students. Through the conferences, my partner and I can get a good understanding of students' fluency (we have them read out loud to us), comprehension, interests, and attitudes about reading. We also learn whether they read at home, what obstacles they face in becoming better readers, and whether they are making wise choices about what they're reading. We work with them to set their own reading goals, to find the right books for them, to overcome their obstacles, and to celebrate books and passages that they love.

—Serena Kessler, English teacher, Romulus High School, Romulus, Mississippi

## A "Show-Me" Checklist

I teach computer application classes, and I like to devise a quick "show-me" assessment wherein I ask the students to perform certain tasks and score them on a checklist that I have made ahead of time. I use the information to individually assist those in need of it, as well as to get an overall view of the collective skills of my class and reteach anything they haven't mastered as a group.

—Cyn Campbell, instructional specialist and technology teacher, Coastal Georgia Comprehensive Academy, Savannah-Chatham School District, Savannah, Georgia

## Book Conferences

I use book conferencing to listen to my students' fluency as well as assess their comprehension. I really get to know each student's strengths and needs as well as their interests. This enables me to guide my instruction while also giving the students the immediate feedback they need to grow as readers.

—Dennine Leschinsky, instructional support teacher, East Penn School District, Macungie, Pennsylvania

## No Assessment Needed!

The year I removed all classroom assessments, behavioral issues were reduced 90 percent, attendance rose, and learning and academic achievement increased dramatically as engagement and rigor skyrocketed. As for grades, students wrote their own curriculums in the form of a hybrid Montessorian contract. Each week, they wrote four goals for each course in which they wanted a grade. Four completed goals earned an A, three completed goals equaled a B, and so on. Removing assessments empowered students to transition toward being intrinsically motivated young adults.

—Dee Hernandez, curriculum coordinator, Milwaukee Public School District, Wisconsin

## Math Pre-Assessments

We began pretesting our students on every essential standard in mathematics. These pre-assessments help us determine how deeply we need to teach each standard to meet student needs. It has been the most powerful assessment, and we have used the data in our district to make decisions about what students are learning, what they need to learn, and how they need to learn it.

—James Scott, director of curriculum, Nadaburg School District No. 81, Surprise, Arizona

## Multiple Measures

I use multiple measures for formative reading assessment in my classroom. I take ongoing anecdotal notes on my reading conferences with individual students. I analyze students' independent reading logs, along with records of participation in class discussions of books. I administer reading surveys to examine dispositions toward reading as well as knowledge of authors and genres. I administer the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment (which my school requires) three times a year and use that data to place students in reading support groups. I use the results of all these tasks to match students with appropriate texts for independent reading, as well as instructional texts for guided reading and small-group work. I also use the results to track and monitor growth and to report to parents and the school.

—Maureen Nosal, 5th grade teacher, The Learning Community, Central Falls, Rhode Island

## A Cognitive Sketchbook

A sketchbook or collection of drawings that show students' creative problem-solving processes can provide incredible data for formative assessment. The blank page enables students to visually think, map, diagram, and take notes in a nonlinear, personal manner. This showcase of cognitive and affective connections is a wealth of information for the teacher when conducting formative assessments in face-to-face conferences.

—Amy Migliore, art educator, Quakertown Community School District, Quakertown, Pennsylvania

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