

NJAHPERD

Assessment Strategies, Tips and Activities

- Forms of assessment can range from performance-based assessments to reflection journals to multiple-choice items.
- They can take the form of checklists, rubrics, written papers or oral presentations, graphic organizers, Socratic questioning, etc.
- They can be teacher observations of student performance, teacher questioning/class discussions, analysis of student work, student self-assessment, KWLs, and student journals, among other informal assessments.

The following approaches are useful for assessing students' knowledge about a given topic as well as their writing skills:

Two Stars and a Wish

Feedback strategies raise the standards of student performance, and Two Stars and a Wish is designed to provide student feedback via peer- and self-assessment.

In short, it solicits Two Stars – areas where the student's work excelled – and one Wish – an area where there can be some level of improvement. It can be administered in several ways, and ideally all three over time:

1. Review an anonymous piece of work with the entire class and have all students provide feedback
2. Break the class into pairs and have them review each other's work
3. Have each student assess their own work

Two Stars and a Wish helps activate students and empower them as owners of their learning, and research suggests that self-regulation of learning leads to student performance improvement.

Quick Write: As a pre- or post-assessment tool, 1- to 3-minute quick writes on a topic or big idea can be revealing. Student responses often show what they do or do not understand about a topic, and they provide the teacher with insights into the reasoning processes that students are using.

Graphic Organizers: These include items such as Venn diagrams, word/idea webs or concept maps, cause/effect charts, flowcharts, and sequence charts. Graphic organizers can be used to assess prior knowledge, record learning during a class, or organize knowledge after learning.

Think-Pair-Share or Write-Pair-Share: These types of activities ensure that everyone has a chance to talk and process their thinking. Ask for two minutes of silence while each student considers his or her response to a prompt, text, lecture, etc. Then, have students take turns sharing their reflections with a partner. Some reflections can then be shared with the whole group.

Entry/Exit Cards: As students enter class, they respond to a prompt displayed on the board or a flipchart (e.g., a sentence or short paragraph) related to the topic of that day's lesson. Alternatively, students can be asked for an "exit card" that provides insight into what they learned from the day's activities or what they predict might follow.

3-2-1

Students consider what they have learned by responding to the following prompt at the end of the lesson: 3) things they learned from your lesson; 2) things they want to know more about; and 1) questions they still have. The prompt stimulates student reflection on the lesson and helps to process the learning.

Four corners

A quick and easy snapshot of student understanding, Four Corners provides an opportunity for student movement while permitting the teacher to monitor and assess understanding. The teacher poses a question or makes a statement. Students then move to the appropriate corner of the classroom to indicate their response to the prompt. For example, the corner choices might include "I strongly agree," "I strongly disagree," "I agree somewhat," and "I'm not sure."

Ticket out the door

Students write in response to a specific prompt for a short period of time. Teachers collect their responses as a "ticket out the door" to check for students' understanding of a concept taught. This exercise quickly generates multiple ideas that could be turned into longer pieces of writing at a later time.

"Separate what you do and don't understand"

Whether making a t-chart, drawing a concept map, or using some other means, have the students not simply list what they think they know, but what they don't know as well. This won't be as simple as it sounds—we're usually not aware of what we don't know. They'll also often know more or less than they can identify themselves, which makes this strategy a bit crude. But that's okay—the goal isn't for them to be precise and complete in their self-evaluation the goal is for you to gain insight as to what they do and don't know.

Review/Communication Ball

Have students form small groups of 6-8. The group will be working on throwing/passing and catching or kicking/passing and trapping while answering questions or completing statements that are related to the content they are learning in class. Have a student begin the activity/assessment by passing the ball to a student that is in the ready position. The

student receiving the ball will then read aloud the question or statement that is closest to their right index finger/toe if using feet and either answer the question or complete the statement.

Inside-Outside Circle

Inside-Outside Circle (Kagan, 1994) is a summarization technique that gets students up and moving. It provides a way to get students who normally would not talk to interact with others. (Social Interaction) After students learn various elements of the content, the teacher divides the group. Half of the students stand up and form a circle with their backs to the inside of the circle. They are partner A. The other half of the students forms a circle facing a partner from the first circle. These students are partner - B. Partner A will speak first, quickly summarizing what they learned or responding to a question provided by the teacher. This takes about a minute. Then partner B speaks for the same length of time, adding to the summary or answering an additional question provided by the teacher. If the teacher stands in the center of the circle, he/she can easily monitor student responses. Now it is time to move. Have the students who are partner A raise their right hands and then move two people to the right to meet with a new partner. Repeat the summary with partner B speaking first. For the third move, have all students who are partner B raise their right hand and move two people to the right. After they are with a new partner, they continue with the summary with partner A speaking first. Depending on the size of the class, teachers may have students move more or fewer times to complete the activity. Inside-Outside Circle holds all students accountable for having something to say. The teacher can use this activity as a formative assessment by standing in the center of the circle and listening to the conversations that take place.

Debate Circles

This formative assessment can be used to activate student thinking and uncover their understandings and misconceptions. Students form a circle in the classroom or another large area. The teacher makes a statement, like, "Which is more important for improving overall health: Sports or Fitness?" Divide the class into 2 groups – 1 group of students will defend the side for Sports and the 2nd group will defend the side for fitness. Have students work within their groups to formulate their position on the topic. The teacher listens to the discussion and assesses student understanding. After the students have had time to formulate their arguments, they form two lines facing one another and students take turns expressing their ideas on the statement.

Laundry Day - The Review

Prior to a final test/summative assessment for a unit, create a 'laundry day' in your gym/classroom during which students prepare to 'clean up' whatever it is they still might not understand. On that day, students enter the gym/classroom to find different laundry jugs/detergent posters in 4 corners of the room. Each jug/poster represents a different stage in their level of readiness for the test:

•**Tide** – students select this detergent if they believe the tidal wave of information might drown them. In the Tide corner the learning activities involve a comprehensive review of

the information and/or an activity that might help the learners experience the information in a different way. Students from the Cheer group often times hang out here to mentor and find creative ways to represent the information that their peers might better understand.

•**Gain** – students select this detergent if they understand the basics of the concepts taught, but seem to be missing some of the nuances or finer details. Learning activities in this corner involve investigation as students identify the details around which they are unsure and then examine the text, classroom activities, homework examples, internet sources and other classroom resources to gain their answers.

•**Bold** – students select this detergent if they are fairly confident they will pass the unit assessment, but still have a few minor questions. Often times, Bold activities involve creating possible review activities for future classes or test questions for the teacher to consider and then have students challenging each other.

•**Cheer** – students select this detergent if they are certain they will be successful on the exam. Cheer activities involve enrichment activities. One such activity involves helping the students in the Tide section. Interestingly, a majority of the students in this category select the option of helping those in the Tide category.

Using their homework as ‘evidence’ as to where they belong, students select the appropriate corner and move toward the laundry jug where they find the appropriate worksheets or activities or instructions to support their continued growth. Students work on these activities for that class period and then they take the test. Once “laundry day” is an established practice in your gym/classroom, students can come prepared with an understanding of which jug they will visit for that particular unit of study and they can get right to work with addressing the responsibilities laid out for that detergent. None of the work generated in these few days should ‘count’ in the gradebook and students will readily accept the opportunity to increase their chances of success on the test.

Jigsaw

With this concept, the class is broken into groups ranging in size from four to six students. Each student is given an index card with a different question and reads their question aloud to the group. One student in each group is assigned to be a record keeper, keeping track of the number of students that a) get it, b) sort of get it, c) aren’t quite sure, or d) just don’t get it.

Once each question has been read, the groups reassemble so that the groups are comprised of students who all had the same question. They then work collaboratively as a team to prepare one answer. The groups then reform to their original members where the answers are shared and the record keeper rescores.

This formative assessment idea is quite collaborative, giving students the ability to self- and peer-assess their work, something that really helps drive formative assessment success.

Popsicle Stick

While perhaps not earth-shattering, the Popsicle™ stick approach to student engagement can provide a more random selection for answers, which means that the consistent hand-raiser isn't dominating classroom discussion (and evaluation). Have each student write their name on a Popsicle™ stick and place all the sticks in a cup. Ask a question of the class, draw a stick from the cup and have the student whose name is on the stick respond to the question.

All-student (random) response systems like this engage all students and sets an expectation that all students are worth hearing, dispel notions of favoritism, and perhaps more importantly identify gaps in student understanding. This formative assessment strategy, can give teachers the real-time, in class assessment information they need to better adapt instruction and meet student needs.

Student Reflection

The teacher can encourage students to reflect on their accomplishments as well as their challenges by asking students to answer questions that spark critical thinking:

What was your task, the ultimate goal, or the outcome for this activity?

What are some important concepts and ideas that you discovered/learned? Why are they important?

How did you solve the problem or task? Did you reach your goal? Explain.

Would you make changes if you had to do it again? Explain.

An open-ended question that gets them writing/talking

To help students grasp ideas in class, ask open-ended questions that require students to write/talk. They will undoubtedly reveal more than you would've thought to ask directly.

Ask students to reflect

During the last five minutes of class ask students to reflect on the lesson and write down what they've learned. Then, ask them to consider how they would apply this concept or skill in a practical setting.

Use quizzes

Give a short quiz at the end of class to check for comprehension.

One question quiz

Ask a single focused question with a specific goal that can be answered within a minute or two. You can quickly scan the written responses to assess student understanding.

Ask students to summarize

Have students summarize or paraphrase important concepts and lessons. This can be done orally, visually, or otherwise.

Hand signals

Hand signals can be used to rate or indicate students' understanding of content. Students can show anywhere from five fingers to signal maximum understanding to one finger to signal minimal understanding. This strategy requires engagement by all students and allows the teacher to check for understanding within a large group.

Response cards

Index cards, signs, whiteboards, magnetic boards, or other items are simultaneously held up by all students in class to indicate their response to a question or problem presented by the teacher. Using response devices, the teacher can easily note the responses of individual students while teaching the whole group.

Use variety

Teachers should use enough different individual and whole group techniques to check understanding that they accurately know what all students know. More than likely, this means during a single class the same technique should not be repeated.

Make it useful

The true test is whether or not you can adjust your course or continue as planned based on the information received in each check. Do you need to stop and start over? Pull a few students aside for three minutes to re-teach? Or move on?

Peer instruction

Perhaps the most accurate way to check for understanding is to have one student try to teach another student what they learned. If she can do that successfully, it's clear she understood your lesson.

Socratic seminar

Students ask questions of one another about an essential question, topic, or selected text. The questions initiate a conversation that continues with a series of responses and additional questions. Students learn to formulate questions that address issues to facilitate their own discussion and arrive at a new understanding.

Misconception check

Present students with common or predictable misconceptions about a concept you're covering. Ask them whether they agree or disagree and to explain why.

Analogy prompt

Periodically, present students with an analogy prompt: "the concept being covered is like ___ because ___."

Practice frequency

Check for understanding at least three times a lesson, minimum.

Formative pencil–paper assessment

Students respond individually to short, pencil–paper formative assessments of skills and knowledge taught in the lesson. Teachers may elect to have students self-correct. The teacher collects assessment results to monitor individual student progress and to inform future instruction. Both student and teacher can quickly assess whether the student acquired the intended knowledge and skills. This is a formative assessment, so a grade is not the intended purpose.

Fist of Five

When you need a quick, immediate assessment, the fist of five is a great strategy. Ask your students a question and have them respond by showing you their level of understanding. Students hold up one finger if they are still unsure of a topic and need to be provided with more information. If they are on their way to fully understanding, they might hold up three or four fingers. Students who have mastered the unit and are able to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding would hold up five fingers. A glance around the classroom provides you with information about student learning and allows you to adapt your instruction accordingly.

Graffiti Wall

The graffiti wall is fun activity for students and gives you a visual representation of what your students have learned during a unit of study. Cover a part of a wall with white paper. Encourage students to write or draw what they have learned about a topic. Students can jot down facts, write personal opinions, connect their learning to other areas of study, etc. Using the graffiti wall activity partway through a unit provides you with information for further planning of instruction. If there appear to be gaps in your students' learning, you can target those areas and further assess to see if there is indeed a deficit that you need to focus on in future lessons. Students may have made connections that you were not expecting or hadn't even thought of when planning the unit. The information you collect from the graffiti wall is valuable formative assessment data. Leave the graffiti wall up during the remainder of the unit and students can continue to add comments and drawings.

Three Facts and a Fib

The three facts and a fib activity is a great strategy to find out what students have learned about a unit of study. Students write down three facts and one fib about a topic. They take turn sharing their three facts and a fib with a partner, in a small group, or with the entire class. Students enjoy trying to identify the "fib." Circulate throughout the class as the students are writing and sharing what they have written.

Teach a Friend

A good strategy for determining if students understand a concept or process is to have them teach it to a friend. Students need to think about the knowledge and skills needed for understanding and include that information in their teaching. Pair students up and have them "teach" their partner about the concept or process.

Placemats

The placemat strategy is an enjoyable activity for students and provides you with information about their current level of understanding. Provide each group of four or five students with a large sheet of paper. In the middle of the paper write the topic or target question. Students divide the paper up so they each have a section to write in and there is room in the middle to summarize their responses. Students individually write or draw to demonstrate their understanding of the topic or target question in their area of the placemat. They then share what they have written or drawn with the other group members. After everyone has finished sharing, students discuss the information and come up with two or three main ideas. They write these ideas in the center of the paper and share them with the rest of the class. An analysis of the placemats provides you with a glimpse of what the students have learned so far in the unit.

Paper Pass

Paper pass is a form of brainstorming that gets students up and moving from their desks. Chart papers with different target words or questions are posted around the classroom. Students rotate around the room to the different brainstorming sheets and add their comments about the topics and about what other students have written. The process for the paper pass can be informal or formal. An informal use of the paper pass permits students to wander around the classroom and respond to the topic words or questions of their choosing. A more formal use involves students being divided into groups and systematically rotating around the room and responding.

Ranking

Invite learners to surface, review, and then rank new concepts, content, and skills that will be learned according to anticipated difficulty. Debrief by asking them to explain their reasoning, and help them use what is learned to approach the experience proactively. Use it to inform the way you support your students as well.

Similes

Ask your students to create similes for concepts, content, and skills they feel they already know. Use their responses to consider the depth and complexity of their understanding. Allow them to revisit and revise their work as they learn more, and challenge them to explain how and why their thinking is changing.

Conjure, Cluster, Categorize

Provide each learner with a stack of sticky notes. Prior to new learning, encourage each student to generate a set of curiosities, questions, and predicted challenges: one per sticky note. Cluster the notes that are relevant to one another, and create categories for the clusters. These can inform your teaching points.

Guess the Question

Provide learners a set of essential concepts that they will explore throughout the new learning experience. Ask them to guess what the most critical questions might be, relevant to each.

First and Final Thoughts

Prior to beginning your study, ask students to share their initial thoughts regarding what they are about to learn, what they are most compelled by, and where their personal interests and needs might be best satisfied. Use this information to adjust the instructional plan. Ask them to revisit and revise these statements at the end of the learning experience in order to describe their levels of satisfaction.

Wonder Board

After introducing students to the topics they will explore, ask them what they wonder, and have them add these questions to a shared display. As learning unfolds, encourage students to attend to these questions and provide time for them to connect and share their discoveries. Alternatively, inspire them to attach the answers they uncover to relevant questions on the wonder board.

A Carousel of Catalysts

Craft a handful of powerful pre-assessment questions that will enable you to understand the needs of your students. Post each question at the top of its own chart, and hang the charts around your classroom. Ask students to carousel from one to another, adding their responses to each question to the corresponding charts.

How Certain Are You?

Challenge students to brainstorm everything they feel they already know about the topic at hand. Ask them to record each idea on a separate sticky note. Then, create a way for them to display these notes according to levels of certainty. For example: post a scale at the front of the room. Label the far left end of the scale “very uncertain” and the far right “very certain.” Ask learners to post their sticky notes on the scale according to how certain they feel about their background knowledge.

Pass the Prompt

This works much like the carousel of catalysts, but learners may remain seated instead of moving around. Here, each catalyst is added to the top of a sheet of paper, and it is passed from one student to the next. Kids add their responses to each sheet as it is received before sending it along.

Squaring Off

Place a card in each corner of the room with the following phrases: Dirt Road, Paved Road, Highway and Yellow Brick Road. Instruct the students to go to the corner of the room that matches where they are in the new unit of study. Students go to the corner of the room and as a group, discuss what they know about the topic.

KWL Charts

K-what do the students already know? W-what do the students need and want to know? L-what did the students learn? An effective pre-assessment tool and summative evaluation tool to measure the level of understanding at the end of unit. Many teachers use the L part as an open-ended question on an exam allowing the students to share the depth of knowledge that was gained in the unit of study.

Yes/No Cards

Students make a card with Yes (or Got It) on one side, No (No clue) on the opposite side. Teachers ask an introductory or review question. Students who know the answer hold up the Yes card, if they don't know the answer they hold the No card. This is very effective to use when introducing vocabulary words that students need as a knowledge base for a specific unit of study.

Boxing

On a large piece of paper, students draw a box in the center and a smaller box inside the first box. In the outside box, answer 'what do I know?' In the inside box, answer 'what do I want to learn?' Now in the outside box, write 'what else do I know?' and 'how does it fit?' In the inside box, draw a visual representation to explain the topic. Finally, in the middle of the box, look at all the information and summarize 'what does that say?'

SA/A/D/SD

(Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree)

Students are given opportunity to express views along a continuum. Given an issue or topic (similar to yes/no cards) students are asked to decide their opinion ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Four corners of the room are labeled with these designations and students able to move to each corner. Class discussion follows asking students to defend their positions, refute arguments and/or reevaluate their opinions.

Word Splash

Content vocabulary is placed on a board, chart, or large paper. Students are asked to use the words in a sentence, paragraph drawing or diagram. (Form connections to meaning)

Assessment: Checks for Understanding

Opinion Chart: List opinions about the content in one half of a T-chart, and support your opinions in the right column.

So What? Journal: Identify the main idea of the lesson. Why is it important?

Clickers (Response System)

Teacher Observation Checklist

Advertisement: Create an ad, with visuals and text, for the newly learned concept.

Muddy Moment: What frustrates and confuses you about the content? Why?

Sticky Notes Annotation: Use sticky notes to describe key passages that are notable or that you have questions about.

Letter: Explain in a letter to your best friend about the content you learned today.

KWL Chart: What do you know, what do you want to know and what have you learned?

The Minute Paper: In 1 minute, describe the most meaningful thing you've learned.

Interview You: You're the guest expert on 60 Minutes. Answer: 1) What are key components of ____? 2) Why does this topic matter?

Twitter Post: Define in fewer than 140 characters.

Pamphlet: Describe the key features of topic content in a visually and textually compelling pamphlet.

Top 10 List: What are the most important takeaways, written with humor?

Color Cards: Red = Stop, I need help. Green = Keep going, I understand. Yellow = I'm a little confused.

Conference: A short, focused discussion between the teacher and student.

Debrief: Reflect immediately after an activity.

Exit Slip: Have students reflect on lessons learned during class.

Sources:

Baltimore County Public Schools — <http://www.bcps.org/>

Classroom Assessment for Student Learning by Richard J. Stiggins, Judith A. Arter, Jan Chappuis, Stephen Chappuis, Educational Testing Service, 2006, 2004.

Formative Assessment in Action: Weaving the Elements Together, by Shirley Clarke, 2005, Hodder Murray

KASC Differentiating Instruction Workshop

RMC Corporation, Denver Colorado — <http://www.rmcdenver.com/>

60 Formative Assessment Strategies Copyright © 2012 Regier Educational Resources. All Rights Reserved.

www.regiereducationalresources.com

http://www.saskschools.ca/curr_content/constructivism/how/preassessment.html