**Medium-Cycle: Assessment Based on a Single Class Unit**

A medium cycle of inquiry is often used for unit-based assessment in single classrooms, or sometimes across an entire grade level. Medium cycles of assessment are usually led by a single teacher or by teacher teams, often in the context of collaborative lesson planning and/or a lesson study <<LINK #5>>.

The purpose of the assessment presented in table L1 below is to determine how well students have mastered the content covered in a single unit. In the “basic assessment” scenario, two issues may arise from the use of an entire unit assessment included in the purchased curriculum materials.

* First, test items may be too closely linked to the lessons; consequently, the assessment results may not lead to **valid** conclusions about student learning across identified content domain; results may instead represent students’ ability to recall what was taught in class.
* Second, if teachers have significantly augmented the curriculum materials, then the assessment won’t reflect the full range and rigor of the content and processes emphasized in the class lessons; if teachers have significantly revised the curriculum materials, the assessment will test content that has not been taught in class.

The use of data in this scenario is also inadequate. By limiting use of the results to grading students, the teacher is missing an important opportunity to more fully examine how students performed on the assessment, both across all items and on each item and standard. Information gleaned at the standard level could be used to plan re-teaching and review experiences. Information at the item level could be used to improve the assessment for future administrations.

In the “better assessment” scenario, the teacher begins the unit by considering what students should know and be able to do as a result of the unit instruction. The teacher further considers the performance of prior classes on similar material to determine areas that proved problematic for students in the past. As a result of this pre-planning, the teacher revises the existing assessment to better reflect anticipated outcomes for the unit. Questions that performed poorly in prior assessments could also be revised or replaced to improve the quality of the test.

In the “better assessment,” the teacher also spends more time analyzing results from the assessment and uses the results to inform future planning and instructional activities, such as re-teaching. As is the case with all assessments whose results are intended to be used to improve instruction, the quality of this unit assessment can be considered directly proportional to its utility in the classroom.

**Table L1. Basic v. Better Medium-Cycle Assessment**

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|  | **Basic** | **Better** |
| **Scenario** | Teacher uses the published unit assessment made available through the curriculum materials. | Teacher revises and augments the published unit assessment with additional items that better reflect what students should know and be able to do at the end of the unit. |
| **Plan** | Toward the end of the unit, the teacher prepares the published assessment to administer to the class. | At the beginning of the unit, the teacher reviews the taught curriculum and assessment results from prior classes, to revise and augment the published assessment. |
| **Implement** | Teacher administers the assessment to the class. | Teacher administers the assessment to the class. |
| **Assess** | Students respond to the exam. | Students respond to the exam. |
| **Analyze** | Teacher computes a final score for each student and enters scores into the grade book. | Teacher generates multiple report views, including reports that show student results overall, by standard, and by item. The teacher removes score results of one item that appears problematic, then rescores and regenerates reports. |
| **Reflect** | Teacher moves on to the next unit with little change in the upcoming instructional plan. | Teacher uses results to plan additional instruction for a standard that was not mastererd by the majority of students, and plans review for three students who performed poorly across the assessment. |