

Questioning as an assessment tool

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How can we use assessment to improve student learning?

Formative assessment, assessment designed with the purpose of finding out what students know, do and understand, is the most effective and useful assessment for both the teacher and the student. The key to making assessment formative, and a tool for effective teaching and learning, is for the teacher to ensure the classroom environment is designed to support activities which focus on assessment. ⁱ

Five key assessment strategies which help learning

- *Clarifying and sharing learning expectations with students* – by being clear about what the learning 'big ideas' are and what achievement looks like, students can plan to achieve their learning goals. Developing criteria for success allows learners into the 'secrets of success'
- *Feedback to move the learners and the learning forward* – for students to 'learn how to learn' they need regular and specific feedback about what they are doing successfully and what they need to do to get to the next goal in learning. This formative feedback helps students to improve their skills and knowledge, as well as giving them successful processes and strategies for achievement
- *Self-assessment* – supporting students to become successful learners enables them to control their own learning; their pace, strategies and outcomes. As they develop skills to manage their learning they become independent learners. Dylan now calls this 'activating students as owners of their own learning'ⁱⁱ
- *Peer assessment* – at times feedback provided by other students can be the key to understanding. It is essential for teachers to explicitly teach, and provide time to practice the giving and receiving of feedback. Feedback focused on the learning ideas, processes and skills is supportive of on-going learning. By developing these student skills, teachers are developing a community of learners with each learner having a part to play in supporting and challenging each other to be successful. Dylan now calls this 'activating students as learning resources for one another'ⁱⁱⁱ
- *'Engineering effective classroom discussions, question, activities and tasks that elicit evidence of learning'*^{iv} this involves teachers in setting up classrooms which support students to demonstrate evidence of their learning. Appropriate questioning is a significant part of the learning environment, as the types of questions asked by the teacher and learners can support or inhibit learning. For students to develop 'big picture' learning in which they develop cross-curricula concepts, the questions they ask and answer are pivotal.



How do you plan questions to help students understand the 'big ideas'?
What types of questions do you ask?
Why do you ask questions?

The focus is on developing a classroom environment to support questions which foster deep understanding and provide teachers with formative assessment information.

Short 'wait times' between a teacher asking questions and expecting student response, encourages fast fact recall, rather than in-depth answers. By extending the 'wait time' before expecting student responses, teachers allow students time to think further than the first idea that pops into their head. One teacher changed the classroom routine by:

- Using big questions, which can have many responses, supports dialogue and conversation rather than 'question and answer' interaction
- Asking a particular student for a response rather than asking for 'hands up'. Cards with student names may also be used to nominate students to respond in a random selection; this also supports all learners to have a turn
- Cultivating an environment in which risk taking and 'having a go' are valued and rewarded by the teacher as well as the students. A supportive environment is essential for students to take risks and to contribute their 'thinking' about questions

These changes, as well as longer 'wait time' allow, and support, more students to be involved in the conversations and to share opinions. When students are sharing opinions it gives the teacher 'a window into student thinking'.

Some strategies to support more focused questioning to assess what students know, and to extend their thinking

<i>Useful verbs</i>	<i>Sample questions</i>	<i>Potential activities</i>
tell list describe relate locate write find state name	What happened after? What happened next? How many? Who was it that ...? Can you name the events/people/places/qualities? Describe what happened at ... Can you tell why? Find the meaning Which is true or false?	Make a list of the main events Make a timeline of events Make a facts chart Write a list of any pieces of information you can remember. List all the ... in the story Make a chart showing Make an acrostic Recite a poem
COMPREHENSION		
explain interpret outline discuss distinguish predict restate translate compare describe	Can you write this in your own words? Can you write a brief outline? What do you think could have happened next? Who do you think? What was the main idea? Who was the key character? How would you distinguish between the two? What differences exist? Can you provide an example of what you mean? Can you provide a definition?	Cut out or draw pictures to show a particular event Illustrate what you think the main idea was Make a cartoon strip showing the sequence of events Write and perform a play based on the story Retell the story in your words Paint a picture of some aspect you like Write a summary report of an event Prepare a flow chart to illustrate the sequence of events Make a colouring book

<i>APPLICATION</i>		
solve show use illustrate construct complete examine classify	Do you know another instance where this occurred? Could this have happened in another way? Can you group by characteristics such as ...? What factors would you change if ...? Can you apply the method used to some of your own experience? What questions would you ask? From the information given, can you develop a set of instructions about? Would this information be useful?	Construct a model to demonstrate how it will work Make a diorama to illustrate an important event Make a scrapbook about the areas of study Make a papier-mâché map to include relevant information about an event Take a collection of photographs to demonstrate a particular point. Make up a puzzle game using the ideas from the study area Make a clay model of an item in the material Design a market strategy for your product using a known strategy as a model Dress a doll in national costume Paint a mural using the same materials Write a textbook about ... for others
<i>ANALYSIS</i>		
analyse distinguish examine compare contrast investigate categorise identify explain separate advertise	Which events could have happened? Can you predict what the ending may be? How was this similar? What was the underlying theme? What do you see as other possible outcomes? Why did changes occur? Can you compare your ideas with those presented in ...? Can you explain what must have happened? How is this similar? What are some of the problems? Can you distinguish between ...? What were some of the motives? What was the turning point in the game? What was the problem?	Design a questionnaire to gather information Write a commercial to sell a new product Conduct an investigation to produce information to support a view Make a flow chart to show the critical stages Construct a graph to illustrate selected information Make a jigsaw puzzle Make a family tree showing relationships Put on a play about the study area Write a biography of the study person Prepare a report about the area of study Arrange a party. Make all the arrangements and record the steps needed Review a work of art in terms of form, colour and texture

<i>SYNTHESIS</i>		
create invent compose predict plan construct design imagine propose devise formulate	Can you design ...? Compose a song Can you see a possible solution? If you had access to all resources how would you deal with the issue? Why don't you devise your own way to deal with (this issue)? What would happen if ...? How many ways can you ...? Can you create new and unusual uses for (an item)? Can you write a new recipe for a tasty dish? Can you develop a proposal?	Invent a machine to do a specific task Design a building to house your study Create a new product. Give it a name and plan a marketing campaign Write about your feelings in relation to... Write a TV show, play, puppet show, role play, song or pantomime about ... Design a record, book, or magazine cover Make up a new language code and write material using it Sell an idea to another person Devise a way to ... Compose a rhythm or put new words to a known melody
<i>EVALUATION</i>		
judge select choose decide justify debate verify argue recommend assess discuss rate prioritise determine	Is there a better solution? Judge the value of this idea. How can you defend your position? Do you think it is a good or a bad thing? How would you have handled this? What changes would you recommend? Do you believe? How would you feel if...? How effective are ...? What do you think?	Prepare a list of criteria to judge items and indicate priority and ratings Conduct a debate about an issue of special interest Make a booklet about 5 rules you see as important to convince others of your argument Form a panel to discuss views Write a letter to ... advising on changes needed Write a half-yearly report Prepare a case to present your view

Why is this successful? What does the research say?

The research of Dylan William and Paul Black is the foundation of this area. They demonstrated that a focus on formative assessment in classrooms can raise the standards of student learning. According to the authors:

assessment for learning is any assessment which the first priority in its design and practice is to serve the purpose of promoting students' learning. Such assessment becomes "formative assessment" when the evidence is actually used to adapt the teaching work to meet learning needs.^v

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For more useful information about assessment visit:

<http://www.decs.sa.gov.au/assessment>

<http://dbi.sa.edu.au/csmoodle/login/index.php>

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- i www.wellington-school.org.uk/senior/documents/DylanWilimaonafi Wiliam, D, 2006 'Does Assessment Hinder Learning?'
 - ii *ibid*
 - iii *ibid*
 - iv *ibid*
 - v Black, P, Harrison, C, Lee, C, Marshall, B, Wiliam, D, 2004, 'Working inside the black box: Assessment for Learning in the Classroom', Phi Delta Kappan, Sept.