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TIPS FROM STEVE



Focus on Assessment & Evaluation - Part 2

Seven Principles of Assessment

We are in a time when so much emphasis is placed upon assessment, that we are forgetting why we need assessment. How many times have you been to an assessment workshop that shows how to take an evaluation of a child, but never spends equal time on how to use the results through instructional strategies and classroom management? This is first in a three part series on assessment and evaluation.

Part 2 of 3

Focus On...

Assessment
&
Evaluation

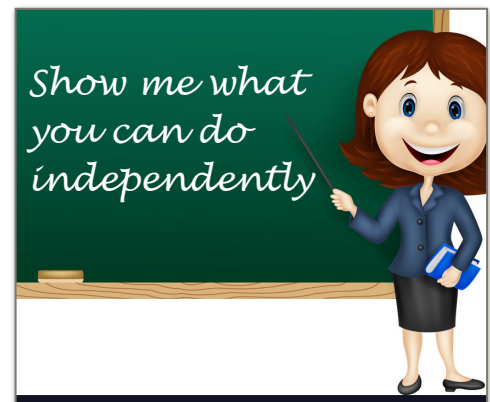
Seven Principles of Assessment

As we consider assessment, let's keep in mind seven rudimentary principles:

1. Use only "raw" data.
2. Look for sustained patterns over time.
3. Look for growth over time.
4. Assess frequently.
5. Record findings in a consistent form that allows longitudinal study.
6. Share information between grade levels through consistent assessment tools.
7. Communicate results to parents.

1. Use only "raw" data

"Raw" data is student work that is untouched by peers, adults, or teachers. Clay (1993) refers to this as "neutral observation." For example, when looking at a student's writing, we want the first draft. This draft could be self-edited and self-revised, but should not be peer-edited or peer-



revised. When a student works with another child, the finished product is a cooperative effort. Peer work is important to help with the social conditions of learning and in helping children construct meaning (Rogoff, 1990), but this work doesn't give a clear profile of the child. Raw data gives us an unclouded understanding of what the child is approximating and has internalized. It is through looking at "raw" data that we can find what the child knows and needs to know. Raw data should be used for evaluation.

It is also important that teachers have authentic data. DeFord (1991) states that "unless teachers develop some ways of systematically gathering observations of students as they actually engage in reading and writing, much of this information is lost and unavailable to teachers as they make decisions about instruction (pg. 101)"

2. Look for sustained patterns over time

Sustained patterns are those reoccurring skills or strategies that we see in more than one example of a child's work. Have you ever observed a student do something only once either by luck, accident, or because they had just received instruction in the concept? While assessing, we are not just looking for these one-time usage, we are looking for patterns that have emerged as habits and are used consistently.

3. Look for growth over time

As children move towards fluency in reading and writing, we should see change and growth in their skills and strategies over time (Clay, 1993). These

skills and strategies should become more complex and self-regulated as children need less support.

4. Assess frequently

In order to know if habitual patterns have emerged, we need to assess frequently. Continual assessment helps us identify and document the habits. This, in turn, leads to instructional decisions that will meet the child's zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978).

5. Record findings in a consistent form that allows longitudinal study

Some assessments are helpful to collect over a long period of time, multiple school years. Findings should be recorded in a consistent form so that teachers can continue the documentation of children's progress throughout the grades from year to year. This enables us to look longitudinally at the child's progress and the effectiveness of the school's program. It is prudent to use the same assessment tools (such as running records or writing inventories) so that we are all talking the same "assessment language" and measuring development using the same criteria.

6. Share information between grade levels through consistent assessment tools.

If assessment is recorded using the same assessment tools, it can be passed on from year to year. Since assessment drives instruction, this will help begin to ensure that children receive a consistent emphasis on similar processes throughout his/her school career. This formative folder can also ensure parents have a feeling of continuity from year to year and from teacher to teacher.

7. Communicate results to parents

Have you ever been to a parent-teacher conference of your own son or daughter where you were shown finished work of your own child and you begin to wonder if there is a Jekyll/Hyde manifestation going on? In front of you sits all this wonderful work produced by your child and you think to yourself, “How can this be? My child never writes like this at home! If the above five traits are in place, parents will not be confused each year when different assessment tools are being used to measure their children’s growth and the next steps. Parents will also begin to see that teacher’s value the same processes throughout the school or district.