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Chapter XII

Designing an Online Formative Assessment that Helps Prepare Students and Teachers for a Summative Assessment:

A Case Study—A Two-Year Pilot Project Pairing an Online Classroom Assessment with a Statewide High- Stakes Test

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Abstract

Across the nation, even prior to the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001, many states had instituted statewide assessment programs. In response to these initiatives, school systems were interested in how to better prepare their students and teachers for the statewide assessment. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, founded in January 2000, was, and is, committed to exploring the ways in which the

improved technology in the 21st century can be utilized to improve educational processes and programs. Based in Seattle, the foundation was interested in working closely within its home state. So the Washington State Education Department, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), and the foundation worked together on funding and managing an online formative assessment system. From 2000 to 2002, a classroom online assessment system was piloted in several districts in the state of Washington. The goals were threefold:

1. *To determine the effectiveness of classroom online assessment*
2. *To give teachers a tool to help them assess student competency during the course of the year toward meeting or exceeding state-required standards*
3. *To increase teacher knowledge of the state standards*

Background

In 1997, the state of Washington introduced its new standards-based statewide assessment program, the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL). The state assessment program initially assessed reading, writing, and mathematics in Grades 4, 7, and 10. Although the high stakes accountability era ushered in by No Child Left Behind was still to come, a high stakes aura was already attached to the state tests. The Grade 10 tests were eventually going to be required for graduation. The score releases each fall for all grades were big media events, and the teachers and students were feeling the pressure. In 2000, a parent of a fourth grade student said, " . . . despite our efforts to convince her this isn't a life or death thing, she's starting to get worried about passing the official test" (Hunt, 2000).

At the 2000 Annual Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction Conference, WASL was one of the main topics. "People [teachers and administrators] are afraid that they won't know enough to help their kids or that someone will take their job away," said State Schools Superintendent Terry Bergeson. "They hear all this stuff about accountability and that someone will come if their kids don't have high enough scores next year and fire them" (Harris, 2000).

Although no one was being fired over the test results, it was true that those teachers might not receive the test results from the WASL in time to help their students. Paper and pencil tests, the predominant assessment method throughout the state and the nation, did not provide quick turnaround time and feedback. It seemed that something else was needed to help prepare students and teachers and to reduce the anxiety that was only growing (Bennett, 2001).

The corporate sector had been turning to technology to process information more efficiently for years, and there was a growing realization that technology could also be applied in the classroom to help teachers process information about their students more effectively (Palaich, Good, Stout, & Vickery, 2000). Specifically, online