Chapter 15
Assessment for Learning

Errin Heyman
Reach University, USA

ABSTRACT

Advances in technology have been integrated into many facets of education, creating both opportunities and challenges for learning and assessment. This chapter provides an overview of effective assessment practices, largely targeted to higher education, with the mindset of using assessment for learning, rather than a more traditional view of assessment of learning. A brief theoretical background is presented as well as specific approaches for implementing learner-centered assessment strategies. Using assessment as a motivator and as a way to deepen, not just demonstrate, learning is discussed. Additionally, the chapter presents future considerations for assessment, especially as assessment can be enhanced by technology—"Education 3.0."

INTRODUCTION

Why is the title of this chapter assessment *for* learning, versus assessment *of* learning? It is just one word, but what a difference one word can make! Consider, for instance, President Franklin D. Roosevelt's speech after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Originally, the speech read, "a date which will live in world history." Roosevelt changed this to "a date which will live in infamy" (National Archives, 2001). "Infamy" is more memorable than "history." Words have power, and they can change intent.

Assessment has traditionally been viewed as a means to prove, to a degree, that some level of learning has occurred—assessment *of* learning (Ewell, 2009). However, if the word "of" is changed to "for," an expanded world of assessment opens up--arguably, for the better. Assessment can be used to not only evaluate whether students have learned what is intended, but it can also be used as a means to further student learning (Allen, 2006; Driscoll & Wood, 2007; Suskie, 2009).

Instructors are responsible for more than transmitting information; they are responsible—to some degree, at least—for helping to ensure learning does in fact occur, or at the very least, students can demonstrate discernable knowledge, skills, or behaviors (Barr & Tagg, 1995; Suskie, 2009). This is largely accomplished through the assessment of student work or artifacts, or through direct observation

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-8032-5.ch015

of students performing a task. Effective assessment for learning hinges upon effective teaching and learning practices, in general (Allen, 2006; Driscoll & Wood, 2007).

This chapter provides an overview of effective assessment practices, largely targeted to higher education in the United States, with the mindset of using assessment for learning, in addition to a more traditional view of assessment of learning. Using assessment as a motivator in addition to a strategy to deepen, not just demonstrate, learning is discussed. The need for equitable assessment is also addressed: the ability to use assessment for learning hinges upon diverse learners being able to benefit from such approaches (Montenegro & Jankowski, 2017). Additionally, the chapter presents future considerations for assessment, especially as assessment can be enhanced by technology—i.e., "Education 3.0."

BACKGROUND

"Curriculum, instruction, and assessment: [these are] the three fundamental components of an education system…" (Orlando, 2007, p. 7). Wiggins and McTighe (2006) discuss important elements of "knowing." What does it mean for one *to know*? For educators, it is critically important that this question can be answered: how do educators know that students know what is expected of them to know? This, according to Wiggins and McTighe (2006), is a central reason to assess.

The idea of the "assessment movement" gained traction in the mid-1980's (Ewell, 2009). This followed suit from the shift toward more learner-centered education (versus teacher or instruction-centered). Instead of instructors being at the center of the educational experience, learners take on more significance. Many educators are familiar with the phrases: "sage on the stage" and "guide on the side." While these phrases may be approaching cliché territory, Alison King coined the terms in 1993 (King, 1993). The ideals behind the phrases represent a significant and powerful shift of mindset. Using lecture as the main way of imparting knowledge has been steadily moving towards more learner-centered approaches (Barr & Tagg, 1995, Driscoll, & Wood, 2007; Fink, 2003).

In 1956, Benjamin Bloom added standardized language around levels of learning, and subsequently, how educators write and measure outcomes. Bloom's Taxonomy, while being revised and refined over the years, is still a useful tool to help standardize learning outcome language and label students' abilities (i.e., assessment based on outcomes). Part of effective assessment is to have a common language.

In 1995, Barr and Tagg described the shift from the instruction paradigm to the learning paradigm: from the idea that educational institutions provide instruction, to one where institutions produce learning. They noted, "To say that the purpose of colleges is to provide instruction is like saying that General Motors' business is to operate assembly lines…" (para. 3). Instruction is means to an end, in this case, and the end goal is learning (Barr & Tagg). Barr and Tagg also argued that instructors should rely less on lecturing and more on allowing students to experiment and practice problems. The learning paradigm allows students to build on their knowledge over time (constructivism) (Barr & Tagg). In the learning paradigm, assessment of outcomes also takes on a more integrated role. For instance:

If we compare outcomes assessment with the input measures controlling policy in the Instruction Paradigm, we find that measures of outcome provide far more genuine information about learning than do measures of input. Learning outcomes include whatever students do as a result of a learning experience. Any measurement of students' products from an educational experience is a measure of a learning outcome. (Barr & Tagg, para. 28)