

Artifact 6-1

While the terms “Assessment of Learning” and “Assessment for Learning” appear similar, the change in preposition results in drastically different approaches. “Assessments of Learning” are what most people would consider a traditional test. They typically result in quantitative (numerical) values that represent a student’s knowledge on specific content. A great example of this type of assessment is the HSA exam required by high school students in Maryland. The HSA, or High School Assessment, is a four subject exam that covers biology, algebra/data analysis, government, and English. Students are required to obtain passing scores on each of these subjects in order to graduate. Content for the exam is developed based on “the knowledge and skills expected of students following completion of the coursework” (Educational Testing Service, 2009, p. 34) “Assessments for Learning” are a more constructivist approach to measuring a student’s cognition of new material. They typically do not result in a grade, but in feedback from the teacher to the student. “Assessments for Learning” can provide ongoing evaluation to both the student and the teacher allowing for adjustments in coursework to be made. A great example of this type of assessment is seen in Sarah Kaufmann’s 6th grade humanities class where she uses post-it notes as a tool for students to reflect on their own work and for her to leave feedback (Digital Learning Group, 2014).

Teacher use of assessments in the classroom is a tricky subject. Because of standardized testing, and required curriculum, “Assessments of Learning” are required in public school classrooms. This involves not only the HAS mentioned above, but other quizzes, chapter tests, and semester finals. Many teachers also will include a variety of “Assessments for Learning” as a way in which to evaluate student’s prior knowledge, their comprehension of daily materials, and their application of new knowledge. Mary James recommends that teachers ask themselves two questions when designing classroom assessments:

1. To what extent do the assessments available to me, or which I create, reflect the kind of learning that I am to promote in students?
2. If assessments lack congruence with learning, how can I try to bring them into closer alignment?

(Swaffield, 2008, p. 20)

These two questions, when answered allow teachers to create and apply different assessment strategies in the classroom that fits with both their pedagogy style and the requirements of the assigned curriculum.

As a biology teacher much of the teaching I will do has strict curriculum guidelines for me to follow. Because of core standards, and the focus on HSA testing I am required to administer and grade a variety of “Assessments of Learning.” However, I still plan to utilize “Assessments for Learning” within my classroom. Much of the subject matter in biology is dynamic and requires prior subject and content knowledge. Starting off new material with informal evaluative assessments and then starting each daily class with “warmup” assessments will help me gauge student comprehension and address areas of difficulty. I plan on having students keep a daily

journal where they will answer a short question about the previous lesson, as well as write about something that they are confused about. During the course of the semester I will hold “warmup quizzes” that will result in a grade. These quizzes will evaluate the completion of the daily journal warmup, not the content. This will promote the completion of the ungraded assignment, and give students what is essentially “free points” for organization.

Digital Learning Group (Producer). (2014). Making Sure They Are Learning. Schools That Work. Retrieved from <http://www.edutopia.org/stw-assessment-authentic-reading-skills-teacher-video>

Educational Testing Service. (2009). Maryland High School Assessment 2008 Technical Report (Division of Accountability and Assessment, Trans.) (pp. 181). Baltimore, MD.

Swaffield, S. (2008). Unlocking assessment : understanding for reflection and application. Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY: Routledge.