



Creating Assessments for All Learners

When I looked around my classroom on the first day of school, it occurred to me that while I was busy writing curriculum, learning about positive behavior supports and Response to Intervention, developing lesson plans for the 21st century, and embedding formative assessments into my instruction, my classroom had changed. As my school became more global, I realized that I needed to differentiate both my instruction and my assessments.

I began to think about universal assessment strategies that applied to all learners and how I could adjust my daily practice. I read the literature on culturally responsive assessment and discovered that high expectations, cultural referents, and relevant resources are essential. Standards can be common to all, but the levels of proficiency need to be flexible. Modifications, support, and frequent actionable feedback are vital for success. Assessment must be appropriate for the content as well as the student, and they should be based on a growth model rather than simply a final criterion-referenced score.

Respecting different cultures means recognizing that symbols, traditions, heroes, and idioms differ from place to place. Communication patterns and learning styles also vary. I didn't need to throw out all of my routine types of assessment: A good foundation of content knowledge is essential for all learners. However, I discovered ways to adapt my assessments for multicultural learners. I made sure that readings reflected global perspectives. For vocabulary assignments, some students simply defined the words and kept a working vocabulary journal. Others started with basic words in sentences, and still others made progress with higher-level vocabulary.

I also modified tests and homework. Sometimes I selected the questions for them to answer; other times the students chose. If there were 20 questions on a quiz, they answered 10. When higher-level thinking, such as analysis, was part of the assessment, students had a choice of an essay or graphic organizer to demonstrate learning. For projects, I accepted multiple approaches and encouraged the use of technology. When collaborative problem solving was the assessment, students were grouped and assessed accordingly. Sometimes students were grouped homogeneously and received differentiated readings and problems to solve. Other times, students were grouped heterogeneously and took on different roles within the group, such as recorder or facilitator.

Quietly and over time, students whose culturally sensitive assessments included options, personalization, and choice began to develop confidence and to share more about their backgrounds and perspectives with other students in the class. At the end of the year, the culminating assessment required looking at the world through the eyes of others. As the mixed groups of students worked together to understand climate change, it became apparent that the quiet leadership skills of students from other cultures made a difference in the classroom. Assessment of the final projects and presentations included student contracts with predetermined learning goals, learning logs with documented progress, peer review, frequent feedback, and rubrics. A final celebration of the learning outcomes and the contributions of each member of the class created an important legacy: All students can achieve to their highest potential.

The bottom line is that good assessment is good assessment. When it is integrated into instruction, when it includes balance, multiple methods, and meaningful feedback, and when it is responsive to the needs of the learners, then all students flourish. A one-size-fits-all standardized test doesn't fit into this equation.

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*This issue was written by Laura Greenstein, founder of the Assessment Network at <http://assessmentnetwork.net>. She is also a teacher at Montville High School in Oakdale, Conn., an adjunct professor at the University of New Haven, and the author of *What Teachers Really Need to Know About Formative Assessment* (ASCD, 2010). Her new book, *Assessing 21st Century Skills*, will be published by Corwin in 2012.*

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