

Assessment... what is it anyway?

(Note: Changes in Assessment philosophy and practice are taking place throughout North America, and are a priority for the RETSD. The following article is a condensed version of a presentation made to parents by Mrs. S. Herbst Luedtke, Assistant Superintendent of Schools, written by Ms T. Miller-Dotzlaw, Maple Leaf Home and School Association.)

What is assessment? It is the process of collecting information with respect to the students' learning. The primary purpose of classroom assessment is to inform teaching and improve learning, not to sort and select students or to justify a grade.

What is the goal? The goal is to involve students in their own assessment so they can see where they have been and where they are going.

How is this different from the past? We used to sort and rank students, compare what the students know relative to their peers, use grades as a motivator for better work and expect that there was only one right way of doing things. This type of assessment information was more useful to the teacher than the student. Now we want all students to learn so we compare their outcome to the curriculum outcome, use different pathways to learning, assess to determine the needs of each student and then to teach to those needs, and involve students in their own assessment.

Successful assessment requires that the outcomes and expectations are clearly defined, are visible to the student, and are objective not subjective. Positive, descriptive feedback on how to meet the criteria instead of evaluative feedback (i.e. grades) is important to this process and motivates the student to be involved in their own learning. The most current information, the most recent evidence of learning, becomes the most accurate assessment.

The seven steps of assessment for learning are:

- Explain the purpose
- Show samples
- Set and use criteria
- Self assessment
- Set goals
- Collect evidence
- Communicate evidence of learning

This allows the student to understand what they are trying to achieve, where they are relative to the target and take specific action to meet their goals. This self assessment is very empowering. Instead of being something that is poured down you, education becomes something you figure out for yourself.

The teacher should gain evidence that learning has occurred by assessing the students in three ways: with products or tests; observing the students; and conversing with the students while they are self assessing. At all times, reporting about learning (giving out a

grade) should be based on the level of achievement of the stated learning expectations only. Including habits and behaviours (i.e. performance on homework, effort made, citizenship/classroom behavior, attendance) when reporting on learning changes the meaning of what the grade represents.

What can I do as a parent? Understand the information about student achievement coming home and know where it fits in the big picture. Make sure you understand how your child's teacher is making assessments. Are they including habits and behaviors in reports of your child's achievements or is this information reported separately? Monitor your child's learning through teacher feedback and ask your child's teacher questions as they arise for you. Encourage your child to set their own goals for learning using feedback on previous work. Know when to worry, when to monitor more closely and when to celebrate your child's learning.

If we teach kids how to think, not what to think, they develop strong values and the confidence to make their own decisions later on in the face of peer pressure. When students are involved in the learning process their achievement improves, their capacity for further learning increases and they are supported to become engaged, competent, lifelong learners.

- *By Teresa Miller-Dotzlaw, member of the Maple Leaf Home and School Association, based on a presentation by Sandra Herbst-Luedtke, Assistant Superintendent for Early Years, 2008*