

# What Teachers Want Every Parent to Know About Quality Assessment



For the past three years, School District No. 23 (Central Okanagan) has been focusing a great deal of attention to helping teachers and schools develop knowledge and skills in the area of quality student assessment. But, what exactly does 'quality assessment' mean to parents and the general public? Assessment in your child's classroom may be different from the assessment you experienced as a child. In the past, when students failed to meet the demands of the curriculum, they failed the grade. Students who failed were more likely to drop out of school before graduation. Now, we check progress and step in early if a student is having difficulty. We adjust our teaching so that students can make continuous progress. Yesterday's testing separated the strong students from the weak; today's testing helps every student learn. Classroom assessment provides the information critical to making each child a successful learner. In today's classroom, assessment is an ongoing and regular part of the teaching and learning process.

## What Does Quality Classroom Assessment Look Like?

A good way to understand Quality Assessment is to look at it in comparison to the traditional evaluation or 'grading' of student work. First, let's talk about assessment. When teachers 'assess' student work, they gather information about the student's learning in relation to the intended learning goal. Teachers use a variety of sources to gather information observation, assignments, learning logs, questions, quizzes, essays, midterm tests, and portfolios of student work. Teachers then use this information to plan for further instruction and to help the students gain a better understanding of where they are, and where they need to be. The information helps teachers to plan what to teach next, to adjust strategies or re-teach where necessary, and to provide feedback to students and parents. Classroom assessments that use multiple sources of information and provide fair, valid, and reliable information promote learning. This type of assessment is often referred to as '**Assessment for Learning**,' because it is done during the learning process and not at the end. It also promotes further learning.

Evaluation, on the other hand, is what teachers do to 'grade' student work and to make a final judgment on the student's progress as reported on the official report card. Evaluation is not done during the learning process; it is carried out at the end. Although assessment information can be used to help a teacher develop a valid 'evaluation' of a student's progress, assessment and evaluation are two different things.

An overwhelming amount of research informs us that **Assessment for Learning** or Quality Assessment is the most powerful tool schools have at our disposal to improve the learning for our students. It suggests that children can learn in six months what normally takes a year—virtually doubling the learning. It also suggests that our more vulnerable children benefit most from the use of Assessment for Learning strategies. Many of our teachers have been using Assessment for Learning strategies and through sharing these and enhancing them, our students will benefit greatly.

To see Assessment for Learning explained in a six minute video, go to:  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3BFGwg9vGJc&feature=related>

## **What Is a Successful Learner?**

A successful learner is a student who:

- can apply the knowledge to new situations
- has a deepening knowledge of the facts and skills taught
- is able to evaluate his or her learning success and set goals for future learning
- is developing intellectually, socially, and emotionally
- is engaged in the process of learning both alone and with others.

## **What Are Standardized Diagnostic Tests?**

Standardized diagnostic tests are used for a few students who appear to have special learning needs. These tests are individually administered by professionals specially trained in the diagnosis of learning problems.

## **How to Help Your Child Learn**

- Read to or with your child.
- Make sure that your child gets a good night's sleep and eats a nutritious breakfast before going to *school*.
- Provide your child with a quiet, well lit place to study. Take an interest in your child's schoolwork. Make sure your child knows what to study for tests and quizzes. If your child is unsure, ask the teacher for advice.
- Go to the parent/teacher conference to get detailed information about your child's progress.

## **What About Province-Wide Tests?**

Tests that are administered in all B.C. schools, such as the Foundation Skills Assessment, PISA or the Provincial Learning Assessment Program (PLAP), are designed to provide information about how the school curriculum is meeting the needs of students. They do not provide enough detail to improve teaching and learning for individual students, but they are useful to curriculum developers and policy makers.