Stephanie Sholtis

Assessment Philosophy

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**My Philosophy of Assessment**

**Introduction**

The reality for teachers and students these days are high stakes assessments in the classroom. It saddens me to see the pressure placed on students and teachers by the districts and society to preform so well on standardized tests. Assessments are a critical part of our education system, but teaching for the test instead of teaching what needs to be taught is where we are failing our students. I understand to ensure the students understand the material an assessment is necessary, but to gear the entire curriculum towards one specific test is asinine.

My philosophy of assessment in the classroom is to monitor the progress of the students, as well as if I am teaching effectively. Different forms of assessment must be presented to guarantee their reliability and validity. Informal assessments during games and activities can ensure the students are having fun, while I am still assessing each child’s knowledge on the curriculum presented. Formative assessments can happen during discussions with the students and determining their level of understanding.

Presenting these two levels of assessments can allow me to determine if the students are understanding the materials, or if I need to change how I am teaching it before we continue further into the lesson. A summative assessment is the final result to a teacher of how effective their teaching methods were for the students. If the majority of the students passed the exam, the methods were effective, but of most failed the lesson needs to be re-taught and presented differently to achieve a different level of understanding to the students.

My second step of my assessment philosophy is understanding that not all students learn or test the same way. I will provide different assessments for different learners, but also teach the skills needed for successful test taking. Too often the skills are overlooked and the teachers focus on just learning the curriculum. I often ask, what good is teaching the information if you are not teaching the skills to use it? If I observe test anxiety among my students, I will teach the skills needed to lessen the anxiety before a test. If students are having problems taking written tests, I will focus on skills to help the students feel confident taken written exams. If project based learning is a problem for students, I will focus on the skills to enhance their learning during the projects. There is no reason for students to struggle in a classroom with a teacher who can provide them the skills and tools needed to succeed.

The key for students to succeed in a classroom with high stakes testing is providing the tools and skills needed for taking tests. Preparation, confidence, and knowledge are the three components when preparing students for assessments. High stakes testing are inevitable, but teaching students the skills to take the tests will help achieve overall success for the student, teacher, and district. Below is important information regarding assessment with statistics, citations, and references to articles and government organizations. Although I do not believe in everything the state requires; I believe the state does want to make the student the number one priority, and by holding teachers and districts responsible for learning, teachers are held accountable.

**21st Century Learners and the Purpose of Assessment/ Classroom Design and 21st Century Set-ups**

The 21st century classroom is a technology -based curriculum with iPads or tablets, laptops or computers, interactive white boards, and even Smartphones with constant Internet access for instant answers for learning (Stevens, 2011). Teachers can access the world with the touch of a button and student’s evaluations can be done just as easily. The use of technology in the classroom can provide instant answers to the teacher regarding assessing students via apps, websites, or developing assessments on a web-book. Most technology- based assessments will provide instant access to results for the teacher such as Pick Stick, Qiua, and ClassKick (Sholtis, 2015). The teacher will instantly know the status of each child and can immediately modify the lesson to fit the need of a child. Another option for children in behavioral support is the app Class Dojo (Sholtis, 2015). The app allows the teacher to monitor the child’s specific behavior goals throughout the day, and parents and students have the option of viewing their goals and feedback instantly.

Another way of looking at 21st century learning is focusing on the skills developed instead of the specific products used in the classroom. The changes occurring in the Pennsylvania Department of Education are focusing on the standards and the new PA Core. The new 21st century learners are now focused on core competencies as collaboration, digital literacy, critical thinking, and problem solving to meet the needs of the new Pennsylvania assessment requirements ("Education Week Teacher Professional Development Sourcebook: How Do You Define 21st-Century Learning?," 2010). Students are to master the concepts while producing, incorporating, and evaluating the information on all subjects and understand that learning is done on with cultural diversity and respect. Students are taught to be creative with technology, and to communicate and collaborate with their peers and understand social responsibility.

The purpose of assessment is to improve students’ learning and teachers’ teaching, and how both respond to the feedback provided (Ministry of Education, n.d.). Assessment for learning is a constant process between teachers and students to hold the teacher accountable for the effectiveness of the teaching. The students are held accountable for the learning by considering the feedback provided by the teacher from the assessment and applying it through the competencies.

Teachers are now mediators, delegators, and captivators for a new audience of 21st century learners (Blair, 2012). The focus on the PA Core curriculum focuses on the standards and the strategies needed to problem solve. Students are now taught to collaborate and communicate in-group discussions on various topics. Teachers need to captivate and engage the students to keep the conversations on topic. The role reverse in the 21st century allows teachers to “back off” of a teacher directed classroom, and allow students to explore new ways of learning through culture and technology; while exploring the concepts of how what they are learning applies to everyday life. This technique of teaching allows the teacher for freedom to observe and visually assess the needs of all students. If the teacher notices a students who is struggling, the teacher can immediately address the student’s needs without waiting for the results of an assessment. The changes in the new curriculum seem to focus more on the needs and success of the child. Once the new PA Core standards and technology upgrades are embraced in the classroom, the success of the students will soon follow.

**Assessment Theories**

Assessment theories are defined as a focus on a student’s knowledge in the domains of cognitive, psychomotor, and affective (Teaching and Learning Hub, 2010). The cognitive domain focuses on knowledge and understanding. Psychomotor domain is the level of skill knowledge is applied, and affective domain is to engage students in instruction to change their attitudes about learning. These theories can be tested through formative, summative, and curriculum based assessments in the classroom. By focusing on the domains when applying the assessments students will learn to think independently and on a broader level through 21st century learning.

Benjamin Bloom’s old theory of “Blooms Taxonomy” provided the concept of learning as: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation (Learning Theories, 2015). This concept of learning applied to only curriculum- based assessments. The teacher must apply all six sets of learning for the students to assess them on the content presented in the classroom. Under the new PA Core and 21st century learning, the changes to Bloom’s Taxonomy are: remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating (Learning Theories, 2015). The changes in the learning pyramid adjust for the needs of the 21st century learner, and the teacher can assess all domains of learning while following Bloom’s Taxonomy.

Howard Gardner’s theory of Multiple Intelligences is an asset to 21st century teachers. Gardner spoke of how each child learns differently and teachers need to differentiate instruction to the needs of the child and not force the child to fit the needs of the classroom (History of Psychology Archives, n.d.). Under 21st century learning, technology (and a little common sense) can provide the teacher with many options to present summative, formative, and curriculum-based assessments to students with different learning needs. An IEP is not necessary for these accommodations; just a different testing strategy will show success in students.

B.F. Skinner’s theory of “the best way to understand behavior is to look at the causes of an action and its consequences” (Simply Psychology, 2014). Applying Skinner’s theory to assessment 21st century learners are provided feedback faster, teachers are adjusting the curriculums, and students are reaching academic success at a faster pace. A formative assessment, under 21st century teaching, can be used as observations, discussions, (under Skinner’s theory) and determine the student’s actions. The consequence could be the teacher re-teaching the information, or the student taking the feedback from the teacher during the discussion and applying it to the summative assessment.

**Educational Scholars**

“Defining and Measuring Academic Success” by Travis T. York states, “primary tenet of good assessment is to clearly articulate what it is you are attempting to measure” (2015). This is the foundation of 21st century learning and the first rule when designing an assessment. The article argues about cross curriculum between professors and the importance of “what” is being assessed based off the concentration of the teacher instead of the curriculum. A teacher whose concentration is in English, but teaching a science lesson must focus the assessment on the standards of science not English. Although cross curriculum is important, the focus of the assessment should be on the standards addressed in the curriculum.

RTII in the classroom starts with the teacher and data collection. For RTI to be successful, educational professionals need to have the core building blocks for implementation (Rush, Dobbins, & Kurtts, 2010). The RTII plan will catch struggling students early and place them in one of the three tiers to achieve academic success. Tier 1 is the primary level, and services at this level can be thought of as the “front-line” in the prevention of difficulties because the primary focus is to apply early strategies and related interventions to eradicate the targeted problem (Rush, Dobbins, & Kurtts, 2010). The key is to offer differentiated instruction so that all students are included in the learning experience based on their individual learning styles.

Tier 2 is the secondary level, are “distinctive in that they are designed for targeted, researched interventions and modifications for the student who is not responsive to the school- wide preventions at the primary level” (Rush, Dobbins, & Kurtts, 2010). This group is often taught in small groups to focus on academic help in small sessions that are geared towards the student’s needs.

Tier 3 is the tertiary level, and is reserved for more intensive assessments and

interventions. Individualized instruction on modified instruction beyond the secondary level is required for the student to access the general education curriculum (Rush, Dobbins, & Kurtts, 2010). Intervention is required on this level for a longer period of time and frequent sessions. Many students have IEPs and require a one-on-one teaching approach.

Benchmark assessments under the Obama administration “…argue that establishing “fewer, higher, and clearer” benchmarks and aligned assessments will empower parents with information about what their children should know and which skills they should possess and that they will hold schools accountable for producing those results” (The Heritage Foundation, 2010). It is under the assumption that more testing leads to students being ready for college. Where the government is falling short at is financially. They pose bills to constantly test students and hold districts accountable for education, but do not consider the cost that goes into the assessments, the changes needed to be made in the districts to accommodate the new teaching strategies, as well as the constant education for teachers. Benchmark assessments are good to determine where a student is at academically and to set goals, but to base an entire country on benchmark assessments is not feasible.

Diagnostic testing in the education system is a way to assess a student’s starting point. It provides a teacher an idea of a student’s ability and knowledge and gives the teacher a “road map” as to how a child learns. Tweed and Wilkinson point out in their 2012 article, “Diagnostic Testing and Educational Assessment” that diagnostic testing is not always a reliable way to test the abilities of students. Many of the results are determined by the opinion of the observer. To avoid opinion based testing, many observers should be available for testing and discuss the results.

**Trends in Education**

The trends in education and 21st century learning fall on technology. Assessments, virtual fieldtrips, behavior monitoring, research, and interactive learning designed by the teacher are the wave of the new classroom experience. Students can answer questions on their cellphones, respond to questions through chat rooms or blogs, and make friends in other countries through virtual trips. The trend of using technology in the classroom also expands the student’s acceptance in cultural diversity.

Expanding technology into assessments will provide the teacher instant results, feedback to the students, and the parents have access to the student’s results and feedback. The concept is the PA Core and standardized testing holds the districts accountable for learning. The Nation’s Report Card informs the public about the academics of the elementary and secondary students in the United States (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). Report cards communicate the findings of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), based on assessments conducted periodically in reading, mathematics, science, writing, U.S. history, civics, geography, and other subjects (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

Reading assessments offer a long -term trend to measure comprehension skills using various assessments, but in assessing math long-term a students’ knowledge of mathematical facts and their understanding of basic measurement formulas is assessed (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). The Nation’s Report Card can break down the statistics based on state, gender, private and public schools, race, and age. Knowing this information can help school districts close the gaps in education, and provide and equal foundation for all students.

**Special Education Assessments**

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) offers five assessment options for standardized testing through No Child Left Behind (NCLB). The first option is “regular assessment based on the state's academic content standards scored against the state's grade-level academic achievement standards” (Cortiella, 2015). Option two is “regular assessment based on the state's academic content standards, with appropriate accommodations as defined by the state, scored against the state's grade-level academic achievement standards” (Cortiella, 2015). Option three is “alternate assessment based on grade-level academic content standards scored against the state's grade-level academic achievement standards (with or without appropriate accommodations as defined by the state)” (Cortiella, 2015). Option four is “alternate assessment based on grade-level academic content standards scored against modified academic achievement standards (with or without appropriate accommodations as defined by the state)” (Cortiella, 2015). Option five is “alternate assessment aligned with grade-level academic content standards scored against alternate academic achievement standards” (Cortiella, 2015). It is important for all students to participate in standardized testing to ensure the scores for the district and to hold the teacher accountable for learning.

Teachers can make accommodations for formative, summative, and curriculum-based tests by understanding the needs of their student. If the child is a visual learner, the teacher can present pictures to the student to answer with instead of words. Audial students can take verbal testing in another room so the other students do not hear their answers to ensure confidentiality. Students with autism can be presented multiple -choice questions in a field of two to answer so the student does not feel overwhelmed. After working in an autism school with multiple diagnoses, I have learned to adapt to the needs of the student, understand how they learn, and most importantly how they communicate.

**Weighting Grades**

Weighted grades are number or letter grades that are assigned a numerical advantage when calculating a grade point average, or GPA. The fundamental idea for weighting grades is that it provides an incentive for students to challenge themselves academically. Weighted grades may discourage some students from taking certain classes, such as art or music, because it might present a numerical disadvantage when calculating GPA and class rank. Academic standards must be met in order for weighted grades to be meaningful. Students tend to focus on the superficial outcomes rather than on more substantive outcomes, such as mastering new skills, exploring new ideas, learning from failure, or enjoying and appreciating the learning process – which are the goals of 21st century learning.

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