How Teachers Assess and Evaluate Their Students’ Learning

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There are several different ways to teach a class, but regardless of teaching methods, one prominent factor must be taken into account; the assessment of the learners. In other words, it is important not only to thoroughly teach the lesson, but equally as important to gauge the learner’s level of understanding before moving any further. Since we are both planning to be teachers in the future, this topic will provide us with the opportunity to research and witness firsthand the different types of assessment. Formal and informal assessment are two separate methods that are available and should be used together in order to fully assess students. Formal assessment deals with testing the students’ knowledge with paper and pencil whereas informal assessment includes verbally questioning the students during or after the lesson, and observation. It is important to evaluate methods of assessment in order to meet the needs of students with differing learning styles. Assessment plays an important role in teaching as well as learning and impacts overall progression in the classroom in various ways. Our goal was to decipher how our host teacher assessed and evaluated his/her students’ learning during and after teaching.

Methodology

Since we realized assessment is an aspect of teaching that is observable, we collected data from our actual observation in the classroom. We focused our attention on how the teacher assessed or evaluated the students, if the assessment was formal or informal, and whether or not it seemed to be effective. In doing so we considered the questions: In terms of informal assessment, does the teacher seem to check for understanding by asking the students questions? Does the teacher walk around to check for understanding as the students are working? In terms of formal assessment, are there pre-tests and/or post-tests given? Are there homework assignments given at the end of the lessons? Does the teacher assign quizzes or tests on the covered material?

Review of Related Literature

Cruickshank, Jenkins, & Metcalf ‘s (2009) define formal assessment as the process of collecting, synthesizing, and interpreting information to aid in decision making. While formal approaches of assessment include projects and tests that
measure comprehension. Informal assessment include approaches such as questioning students within a lesson and observing students as they engage in small group discussion. Thus through assessments, teachers are able to evaluate students’ comprehension or progress (p. 295).

Informal assessment allows a teacher to question students in order to guide them and strengthen their understanding of the concepts being stressed. Questioning students is an essential element in the learning process. This type of informal assessment may encourage students to later assess themselves as they learn on their own. It is important to assess all students so that each student is equally involved (Blanton, 2009, p. 56). Observing and evaluating a student’s accomplishments or procedures is the best way to measure students’ comprehension in areas such as performing a physical task or following a set of procedures. Some examples of this include an art teacher evaluating the quality of students’ projects, a speech teacher assessing the ability of students speaking in different ways, and a science teacher evaluating students as they conduct an experiment (Cruickshank, et al., 2009, p. 317-318). In summary, informal assessment relies more heavily on what students produce than how they respond, assessment projects rather than testing, and the teacher’s judgment rather than structured scoring (Spinelli, 2008, p. 2).

Another name for formal assessment is summative assessment, meaning that it attempts to summarize students’ achievement or progress. The main purpose of formal assessment is to judge the success of a learning process after it has been completed. Some types of formal assessment techniques include formal testing, projects, and also term papers. Grades or scores are indicators of what the students’ have comprehended and recorded during this type of assessment and evaluation (Cruickshank, et al., 2009, p. 300). Format options found within the testing category of formal assessment often include multiple choice, true/false, matching, and short-answer questions (Stiggins, 2008, p. 77) to mention a few. The importance of formal assessment is that it can provide both students and teachers with essential feedback regarding what students have and have not mastered and the quality of a teacher’s instruction (Guskey, 2008, p. 28).

Assessment alone is a waste because what is most essential is how teachers use the results they gather. An unfortunate fact today is that most teachers overlook this vital aspect and by doing so, they fail to produce the crucial benefits that should accompany assessment. As teachers, it is important to obtain valid and reliable proof of students’ comprehension based on the targeted learning areas. It is equally important to use the information gathered to enhance student achievement (Stiggins, 2008, p. 75). In order to progress student learning, feedback concerning specific areas of improvement is an essential part of evaluation as well as correctional instruction as to which needs were not met (Guskey, 2008, p. 29).
Thirty-five years ago Benjamin Bloom, along with his colleagues, identified specific learning tools which have proven to be important in classroom assessment (Guskey, 2008, p. 28). Both formal and informal techniques are essential to assessment. Asking questions and observing are examples of informal assessment while formal assessment encompasses testing and other assignments (Cruickshank, et al., p. 295). These two components are useless without proper evaluation techniques and follow up procedures. The main types of assessment, and the evaluation that follows, are essential to a teacher’s success in monitoring student comprehension and progress.

**Results**

During our day in school experience, we observed and interviewed our host teacher and also observed the seventh grade science class to gain firsthand experience on how assessment and evaluation is carried out in the classroom. On the first day, we strictly observed to gain information. We witnessed the teacher using both informal and formal assessment, as well as certain evaluation techniques to accompany the assessment. After interviewing the teacher on the second day, we were able to gain a further understanding on the types of assessment and evaluation the teacher uses, which she did not use on the first day of observation.

The main example of informal assessment that we witnessed the teacher using was questioning the students. She started out that particular day’s lesson by asking questions about what the students remembered or comprehended from the previous day’s lesson. This helped the teacher to understand what she had to reiterate from the previous lesson, in order to allow for her students to catch up and move on with the new lesson. The teacher showed a video in class during the first day that we observed. One way of ensuring that her students were following along and obtaining important information was that the teacher paused the video every now and then to clarify information. Observing the students as they took notes was another example of informal assessment that our host teacher used. She walked around the room and made sure her students were writing down pertinent information, and even gave them ideas about how to use effective note-taking techniques. To bring the lesson to a close at the end of the video, she verbally reviewed the important aspects of it, and also questioned the students’ comprehension of those important aspects.

After interviewing the teacher, she explained to us that she feels informal assessment is very important and should be used throughout a lesson, not just at the beginning or the end. She also explained that she finds it very important to use open-ended and high-ordered questions while informally assessing her students. This allows for her to understand what information her students do or do not understand. Graphic organizers, such as the KWL, are also a significant aspect of her informal assessment. The KWL allows students to write what they already know about the topic and what they want to know.
about it before the lesson begins, and then what they learn after the lesson is completed.

Although we did not observe as much formal assessment as informal, the host teacher still did incorporate it into her lesson. Before the video was started, the teacher gave the students a corresponding worksheet to complete as they followed along with the video. As they viewed the video, they were to take notes and answer questions on the worksheet which the teacher explained would be information they would be graded on later. Another example of formal assessment that we witnessed on the observation day was the implementation of a video quiz at the end of the video. This quiz consisted of twenty-two questions including multiple choice, true/false, and fill in the blank. The students recorded their answers on their worksheets and the teacher went over them at the end of class. The teacher also informed us of other ways she formally assesses her students from the interview on the second day. She explained that she uses formal assessment two to three times throughout an entire unit, but not very often for specific chapters or lessons. The assessment formats she used included quizzes, tests, homework assignments, and other graded worksheets.

While it was more difficult to observe and interpret, we were able to witness the teacher evaluating the information she gained from the informal and formal assessment of her students. After the students had completed the video quiz questions, she went over the answers with them. If she noticed that some of the students were getting the answers wrong, she made sure to go over those particular questions in more depth and explained why the answers given were right or wrong. She often re-worded or re-phrased the questions that may have been difficult for the students to understand as well (Guskey, 2008, p. 29). Since the teacher has four different groups of students throughout the day, due to it being seventh grade, she is faced with the issue of figuring out what teaching style is most effective for each of the four groups of students. She evaluated herself as she taught each period to see what she needed to change with her lesson, and in doing so, her lesson was much more smooth and closer to being perfected by the last class period.

Discussion

The host teacher frequently assessed the students informally using what we found to be the most popular method from our research, which is questioning (Blanton, 2009, p. 56). She questioned her students at the beginning, middle, and end of the lesson. The host teacher also observed her students constantly, which we found to be another important type of informal assessment.

In terms of formal assessment, the teacher did not feel this type of assessment was as important as informal assessment, therefore she used it less often. However, the teacher used formal assessment formats such as quizzes, tests, homework assignments, etc (Stiggins, 2008, p. 77). Also, according to Cruickshank, et al., 2009, formal assessment is used to review what the students have learned, after learning has been completed, and grades are also
indicators of formal assessment (p. 300). The host teacher displayed this concept because she assigned formal assessment at the end of units and she also graded the assignments.

Evaluation of the assessment given is equally, if not more important, than the actual assessment itself in order to use the information gathered to enhance student achievement (Stiggins, 2008, p. 75). We believe that the host teacher greatly understood this concept. As she assessed her students informally and formally, she constantly repeated information that was important for her students to remember. She also explained why the video quiz answers were right or wrong, instead of simply telling the students that they were right or wrong. The host teacher verbally elaborated on questions to the whole group of students, as well as spoke to individual students who needed more clarification as well.

**Recommendations**

Overall, we feel that the host teacher was successful in assessing and evaluating her students. She used both informal and formal assessment effectively, which we concluded due to the fact that her students seemed to understand her and she was always the one asking questions of her students, instead of vice versa. However, we would recommend that she use formal assessment more often. Even though she made use of formal assessment at the end of each unit, we believe she could assign more homework or more graded activities throughout a lesson or unit so that students remain focused so that she can constantly assess their comprehension. We feel this would benefit the host teacher, as well as the students, and she would be able to evaluate her students more effectively as a result.

**References**


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