



Center for
K–12 Assessment
& Performance Management

An independent catalyst and resource for the improvement of measurement and data systems to enhance student achievement.

Exploratory Seminar:
Measurement Challenges Within
the Race to the Top Agenda
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ASSESSMENT FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING

This policy brief is based on a presentation by Margaret Heritage (University of California, Los Angeles) at the Exploratory Seminar: Measurement Challenges Within the Race to the Top Agenda, December 2009. Download a copy of the final paper written by Dr. Heritage, as well as the other papers presented at the seminar, at <http://www.k12center.org/publications.html>.

Assessments that are going to be helpful for instruction will not focus on past learning but on what is emerging and becoming the next phase of a learner's development. Teachers need those kinds of assessments to lead learning and need intensive support on how to use them. Presently, we do not have an assessment framework that informs teachers of their students' learning development. We need to give teachers the maximum quantity and quality of tools they need to lead development.

The current support for redesigning assessment systems is an opportunity to consider how assessments can make teachers more effective in classrooms. Effective teaching is the interaction between teachers and students that leads to further student learning. Teachers need to plan those interactions to support engagement with materials and experiences. The interactions need to make connections between prior and new learning, and they need to provide feedback to students so students can develop metacognitive skills.

Current assessments, however, represent a past-to-present model that identifies what already has matured, not potential development. This is a useful model for accountability, telling where students have come from and where they are at a fixed point. However, these assessments also are static, providing both teachers and students only with scores that are difficult to interpret. These current assessments are not helpful for instruction. They do not give teachers sufficient indication about what is within a student's reach—what is close, what is ripening—that teachers can build on to help students' learning develop. Assessments should indicate this zone of nearest development (ZND).

A Present-to-Future Model

The core of an assessment to lead learning is to determine how a student responds to assistance. Present students with a task, then a first level of help, followed by different levels until they reach the point where they can go no further with assistance. The results would characterize the region of tasks between what the learner could accomplish alone and what could be accomplished and ultimately

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mastered with assistance. Dynamic assessments would extend the ZND approach and further support learning through:

- Assessments that include a second component of questions, probes, and tasks for teachers to use.
- Providing teachers with the scaffolding and formative assessment strategies they can use to keep learning moving forward in the zone of present development (ZPD).
- Strategies that can be used to provide feedback and support metacognitive activity and self-regulation.
- Setting upper boundaries of learning potential, with change as the student moves to independent competence.

Students should be much more engaged in the process of assessment and figuring out, “ I can do this if I have some help, but I can’t do this on my own.” Through self-assessments, they are engaging in a metacognitive activity and learning strategies for themselves that are going to promote their learning and understanding of what they need to do to move forward.

Assessments and Learning Progressions

As other presenters pointed out, learning progressions can provide teachers with a trajectory of how learning develops. Hopefully, the Common Core Standards will lay out how competence develops in a domain and bring curriculum, instruction, and assessment together. They should connect ideas that create networks of schemata, allowing learners to reach mastery of the structure of a large body of knowledge. An instructionally useful assessment framework incorporating learning progressions would include:

- Map assessments to learning progressions in line with cognitive and information processing research.
- Focus on assessing the development of schemata and subschemata and skills.
- Use three levels of assessment focus that operate within different assessment cycles, milestone performance (skills) spanning a long period of instruction, subschemata skills and determining the students’ ZPD; scaffolds/probes linked to frequent assessments, and scoring rubrics that are clear for each level.
- Build the three levels of assessment focus on different grain sizes for different purposes, but rest all levels on the same model of learning, with all levels supporting teaching and learning, so the levels will be complementary.
- Provide teachers with the information they need to lead learning.

- Permit students to be involved with their teachers in assessing and monitoring their own learning.
- Assess affect, motivation, and self-regulation.

There are interesting ways that technology could help assess the levels students have attained, but technology should not become the surrogate of the teacher. Student and teacher need to determine together where the ZND is and keep learning moving forward. The assessments are about tasks in the classroom where teachers and learners interpret performance based on what the students are able to do unassisted.

Supports Teachers' Needs

The substantial investments needed to make it possible for teachers to lead learning would begin in preservice education. Currently, teacher candidates do not learn what it means to develop competence in a domain or how to integrate assessment information into instruction in the ZPD. Vastly better descriptions of learning would need to be developed for inservice programs and professional learning communities, as well. Other supports teachers would need include:

- Help in developing models of how students' thinking and skills develop within across domains.
- Help in learning how to include students in the process of assessment and learning.
- Assessments that are cost-effective and time-efficient.
- Strategies for understanding performance criteria and comparability of judgment.
- Contractual changes that provide more time for reflection and planning.

For More Information

For more information on this subject, please see the paper by Dr. Heritage:

Heritage, M. (2010). *Assessment for teaching and learning*. Retrieved from <http://www.k12center.org/publications.html>.