



Student-Centered Classroom Assessment

Richard J. Stiggins

Student-Centered Classroom Assessment

Richard J. Stiggins

Assessment Training Institute

Merrill, an imprint of
Macmillan College Publishing Company
New York

Maxwell Macmillan Canada
Toronto

Maxwell Macmillan International
New York Oxford Singapore Sydney

Cover art: Karen Guzak
Editor: Kevin M. Davis
Developmental Editor: Linda Kauffman Peterson
Production Editor: Laura Messerly
Text Design Coordinator: Jill E. Bonar
Cover Designer: Patti Okuno
Production Buyer: Patricia A. Tonneman

This book was set in Garamond by The Clarinda Company and was printed and bound by Arcata Graphics/Martinsburg. The cover was printed by Phoenix Color Corp.

Copyright © 1994 by Macmillan College Publishing Company, Inc. Merrill is an imprint of Macmillan College Publishing Company.

Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the Publisher.

Macmillan College Publishing Company
866 Third Avenue
New York, NY 10022

Macmillan College Publishing Company is part of the
Maxwell Communication Group of Companies.

Maxwell Macmillan Canada, Inc.
1200 Eglinton Avenue East, Suite 200
Don Mills, Ontario M3C 3N1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Stiggins, Richard J.

Student-centered classroom assessment / Richard J. Stiggins.

p. cm

Includes bibliographic references and index.

ISBN 0-02-417350-9

1. Educational tests and measurements--United States. I. Title.

LB3051.S8534 1994

371.2'6--dc20

93-29232
CIP

Printing: 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Year: 4 5 6 7 8

A Critical Message to the Reader

Greetings to you and welcome! We are about to take a very special journey together—a journey through the diverse and critically important world of educational assessment. Indeed, your success as a professional educator, whether as a classroom teacher or an administrator, will depend on your understanding of this world and your ability to work effectively within it. As you shall see, both student achievement and academic self-concept are determined, by and large, on the basis of students' perceptions of their own success in the classroom. Those students rely almost completely on the day-to-day, week-to-week, and term-to-term assessments of that achievement conducted by their teachers to judge their current success and their hope of future success.

For this reason, students count on us, their teachers, to know what we're doing when it comes to assessing achievement. If we do, in fact, know how to assess well, and if we gather sound information about student achievement, we have the opportunity to contribute immensely to their success in school. But if we do not understand the principles of sound assessment and therefore systematically mismeasure actual academic achievement, we are likely to do great harm to our students, both *in terms of their actual achievement and their academic self-concept*. For this reason, our journey through the world of classroom assessment is an important one indeed.

A SPECIAL PHILOSOPHY

The chapters that follow present a special philosophy about classroom assessment—a philosophy that places students at the center of the assessment equation.

To assist you in understanding this philosophy and in interpreting the assessment advice offered herein, let me spell out some of the values on which it is based.

Without question, the single most important value any teacher must bring to the classroom assessment process is a very strong sense of caring about student well-being in school. As teachers, we must not just believe that all students can learn, but must really want each and every student to feel the exhilaration of success in school and beyond. Our goal must be to have each student feel free from academic and personal harm in school. For this reason, we must all become fanatics about the thoughtful, sensitive use of assessment within the instructional environment. There are five principal reasons sound assessment is such a crucial part of the instructional process.

First, our classroom assessments define for students the outcomes we value—they define the truly important achievement targets. Second, classroom assessments provide the basis of information for student, parent, teacher, principal, and community decision making. Third, they motivate students to try—or not to. Fourth, they screen students in or out of programs, giving them access to the special services they may need. And fifth, classroom assessments provide at least part of the basis for teacher and principal evaluation.

Because of all the roles they play, classroom assessments make major contributions to the effectiveness of schools and classrooms. For all of these reasons, these day-to-day assessments can help students prosper.

Over the past fifteen years, I have endeavored to understand how assessment can fit productively into the day-to-day instructional process. In addition, I have learned valuable lessons about the meaning and impact of classroom assessment as a parent watching a youngster experience all the good and bad of classroom assessment during her years in school. These simultaneous learning experiences as a researcher and a parent have helped me understand that it is the day-to-day classroom assessment processes that drive the teaching and learning processes in schools.

We all know that classroom assessments are not the tests that command all of the public and political attention—that eat up the assessment budget each year. It is not our classroom assessments that draw all of the news coverage and editorial comment. Nevertheless, anyone who has taught knows that it is classroom assessments—not standardized tests—that provide the energy that fuels classroom practice. For this reason, those classroom assessments absolutely must be of high quality.

A COLLABORATIVE EFFORT

We can achieve this goal together by collaborating in the process of understanding and applying a common-sense meaning of assessment quality. As my part of the collaboration, in the chapters that follow, I offer practical assessment ideas communicated in everyday language with understandable classroom examples. You can fulfill your part of our bargain by studying these ideas, reflecting upon them and/or discussing them with fellow students or colleagues, trying them out in your instructional context, and adapting these ideas to meet the needs of your students.

The success of our joint efforts on behalf of sound classroom assessment will hinge on the extent to which you actively strive to make your own personal meaning of the material presented herein. For this reason, I have inserted “Times for Reflection” throughout the text. If you will take time to think about the issues at the time they are raised in the text, you will have a much easier time connecting the assessment ideas presented to your prior knowledge and experience.

Further, as we journey together, read critically. Ask tough questions about what you read here and test the assessment strategies suggested against your own good judgment. In these ways, you will become a critical consumer of assessments and the information they provide.

A TOUGH CHALLENGE

Be advised from the outset that the following chapters contain some rather complex material. You will also find that there is much to learn about the assessment process. This goes with the territory. Nowhere in this text will you hear me say that the assessment task is easy—only that it is critically important.

Don't be put off by complexity or scope of assessment. Dig in and master it! If you do, both you and your students will benefit greatly. Assessment has a reputation for being quantitative, complicated, dry, and boring. This need not be the case, however. Rather, assessment can be both challenging and empowering! Over the decades, many educators have faced assessment training with some trepidation. Even today, most see assessment as the process of quantifying student achievement. Typically, that leads to inferences about the mathematical nature of assessment, math anxiety sets in, and panic follows close on its heels. Please try to let that fear go right now, if you can. There is no need for math anxiety here. Assessment is *not* a mathematical challenge. Assessment is a challenge in clear thinking and effective communication.

A ROADMAP OF OUR JOURNEY TOGETHER

Our journey will unfold in four parts: Understanding the Classroom Assessment Context, Understanding Assessment Methods, Classroom Applications of Assessment, and Communicating about Student Achievement. Each part offers unique perspectives on the classroom assessment process, yet the four parts present a unified overall picture of the assessment process and its place in day-to-day instruction.

Overview of Part 1. Our journey begins by defining assessment roles and responsibilities and by describing the essential elements in the classroom assessment process. As Part 1 unfolds, you will see what it means to be a responsible, well-prepared classroom assessment professional, as we talk about what it really means to be assessment literate. What is a quality assessment, anyway? How does a sound assess-

ment differ from an unsound one? What competencies must one master to assure sound assessment from the classroom to the boardroom?

We also will explore critically important changes taking place in our perceptions of the role of schools in our society. The very function of schools is changing in deep-seated and fundamental ways. These changes make it essential that each and every educator, and indeed everyone involved in the setting and implementation of educational policy and practice, attain a certain level of assessment literacy—a fundamental understanding of the basic principles of sound assessment.

We will march right inside the world of assessment in schools by exploring all of the different levels of users and uses of assessment. Three different levels of assessment use will be explored: instructional uses, instructional leadership uses, and uses in setting policy. Through this discussion of the meaning of quality and various assessment roles and responsibilities, I will make it perfectly clear why the teacher lies at the heart of the assessment matter in school.

We will explore the two key elements in the classroom assessment quality-control equation: (1) knowing what is to be assessed and (2) knowing how to assess it. With respect to the *what* of the assessment equation, the critical question will become: Do you know what it means to succeed in your classroom or school? If you do not know the meaning and limits of this target, and cannot convey them in meaningful terms to your students, you doom them to fail.

With respect to the *how* of the classroom assessment equation, you will learn about the four different modes of assessment available for classroom use. And most importantly, you will see how these various methods can be aligned with the various kinds of outcomes we value to produce assessments that make sense to students, teachers, parents, and all involved in the educational process.

Overview of Part 2. Once the stage is completely set in Part 1, we will begin an in-depth study of the assessment methods we have available for classroom use. Part 2 is divided into four chapters, one each on the design and development of selected response tests (multiple-choice, true/false, and the like), essay tests, performance assessments (assessments based on observation and judgment), and assessments that rely on direct personal communication with students, such as questioning during instruction, interviews, and conferences.

Each of these chapters presents its assessment alternative in a manner calculated to help you understand how its potential contributions lead to effective instruction. First, we discuss the kinds of achievement targets with which the method aligns. Then, we outline keys to effective development. We conclude each chapter by discussing productive ways to bring students into the assessment process as full partners—ways to use assessment as a very effective teaching tool.

Over the decades, each of these four basic assessment methods has experienced its time of prominence and of disfavor. As a school culture reflective of the larger society, our views and attitudes about the various ways of assessing seem to ebb and flow. Right now we are in the midst of a time that favors performance assessment. We used to place more emphasis on selected response tests. Times change. However, in this book we will strive to present a balanced view of sound assessment practice, including many methods as viable options.

The bottom line is that we face a huge classroom assessment challenge as we move into the twenty-first century. We have many different kinds of increasingly complex outcomes to assess. As a result, we have no business discarding any of the tools we have at our disposal. For this reason, each chapter in Part 2 is written from a decidedly positive point of view about the potential of the assessment method being discussed. This positive bent is tempered, however, by the resolute position that each method can and will reach its potential only if its developer and user adheres to accepted rules of evidence for using it well. Those rules, too, are spelled out in Part 2.

Overview of Part 3. With a solid foundation of basic assessment methodology in hand, we will turn our attention to classroom applications. This part of the book is divided into four chapters that deal with the assessment of different kinds of achievement targets. We will explore the assessment of student reasoning and problem solving in all of its many forms, proficiency in demonstrating important skills and in creating products that meet standards of quality, and attainment of important affective outcomes. In addition, we will explore the role of large-scale standardized testing in the classroom.

Each of these chapters will examine the potential match between the kind of target being addressed and the four kinds of assessment methods studied in Part 2. In addition, you will find many examples in the union of method and target that reveal creative ways to use effective classroom assessment to generate accurate information about student achievement and to use assessment as a teaching strategy.

The goal in Part 3 is to make classroom assessment live in your mind, not as a set of abstractions, but as a real, potentially useful set of concepts, tools, and strategies that can bring students into the teaching and learning process in new and creative ways.

Overview of Part 4. This concluding section is divided into three chapters that deal with communication about student achievement from various perspectives and a chapter that summarizes our entire journey together.

We begin with a discussion of report cards and grades in the context of performance-based schools and educational programs. We will explore what it is we need to communicate via grades and how we can go about gathering and summarizing that information through report cards and grades most effectively in the future.

The discussion of communication options doesn't stop there, however. We will use report cards as a point of departure for exploring many other possibilities. Among these are more detailed checklist and narrative reports, student-teacher conferences, student-led parent-teacher conferences, and portfolios. These are presented as communication alternatives that show great promise in the information age.

In Part 4, we also address communication about the meaning of quality assessment across levels of responsibility in the educational process. The potential contributors to the creation of a positive, constructive assessment environment in schools includes legislators, state department of education personnel, local school boards, district staff, principals, teachers, parents, and students. We will detail the specific

nature of the contribution of each and the critical need for effective communication among contributors.

Throughout our journey two themes will permeate. First, we must know how to develop and use sound assessments and how to use them well in each and every classroom. Second, students can and should be full partners in the assessment process. Our challenge is to find creative ways to use student self-assessment as a teaching strategy. This book is devoted to meeting both of these challenges.

ONE FINAL THOUGHT

Let this book represent the beginning of a career-long exploration of discovery on your part. It is not possible to cover all critical elements of educational assessment in one introductory volume. For this reason, it is important that you regard our journey as a first excursion into the realm of assessment, to be followed by others as you move on to more advanced topics. I will give you a list of additional readings at the end of our trip. Now and always, you must endeavor to seek new understandings of assessment.

If you are ready, then, let our journey begin.

Rick Stiggins
Portland, Oregon

Acknowledgments

S *tudent-Centered Classroom Assessment* represents the results of twenty years of preparation under the tutelage of many outstanding primary, elementary, junior high, and high school classroom teachers. In a very real sense, this book conveys the collective wisdom of those many teachers, who shared openly of their assessment ideas, uncertainties, and frustrations. First, let me express deep appreciation to them for sharing their students and learning environments, and for communicating about assessment issues in such a frank and honest manner. They welcomed me into their world, and helped me to understand it.

Special thanks also to my wife, Nancy Bridgeford, and Sharon Lippert of the Assessment Training Institute team. Nancy possesses that uncanny ability to ferret out writing that fails to convey clear meaning. Nowhere is effective communication more important or more challenging than in a book like this. Nancy made effective communication possible here. Sharon not only prepared all versions of the book manuscript, but she also has prepared most of the previous versions of these ideas as we have accumulated them over the past two decades. Her patience and sense of presentation contributed immensely to this final product.

Several members of the staff of the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, Portland, Oregon, contributed to the completion of this volume, both as reviewers of drafts of the final product and as partners in the classroom assessment research that culminates here. Special thanks to Judy Arter, Ruth Culham, Vicki Spandel, and Bob Rath—outstanding teachers all—and to Maggie Rogers, for a wealth of information. A special remembrance also to Nancy Faires Conklin, who continues to inspire.

Others contributed by providing assessment strategies and/or by reviewing and making constructive suggestions about various chapters. These contributors include

Eric Bigler, Cindy Clingman, Dan Duke, Edys Quellmalz, Doris Sperling, and Tia Wulff.

Special thanks to the Macmillan team of editors Kevin Davis, Linda Peterson, and Laura Messerly, and freelance copyeditor Robert Marcum—a truly skilled word crafter. In this context, let me also acknowledge the contributions of the following reviewers during the preparation of the manuscript: Susan M. Brookhart, Duquesne University; Leland K. Doebler, University of Montevallo; Betty E. Gridley, Ball State University; Thomas Haladyna, Arizona State University West; Robert W. Lissitz, University of Maryland; Ronald N. Marso, Bowling Green State University; Michael A. Miller, Mankato State University; and Kinnard White, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. They shared openly of their wisdom and criticism, and they will find the fruits of their labor in the final product.

We know far more as a community of learners than any of us does alone. The insights shared herein arise from many classrooms, representing the collective wisdom of many who care first and foremost about student well-being in the context of educational assessment.

Rick Stiggins
Portland, OR

Brief Contents

PART ONE

Understanding the Classroom Assessment Context		1
CHAPTER 1	A Principled View of Classroom Assessment	3
CHAPTER 2	Changing Assessment Times Bring New Assessment Responsibilities	19
CHAPTER 3	Understanding the Critical Roles of Assessment	39
CHAPTER 4	Specifying Achievement Targets	59
CHAPTER 5	Understanding the Assessment Alternatives	81

PART TWO

Understanding Assessment Methods		97
CHAPTER 6	Selected Response Assessment: Still Useful after All These Years	99
CHAPTER 7	Essay Assessment: Vast Untapped Potential	133
CHAPTER 8	Performance Assessment: An Old Friend Rediscovered	159
CHAPTER 9	Personal Communication: Another Window to Student Achievement	205

PART THREE

Classroom Applications 231

- CHAPTER 10 Assessing Reasoning in its Many Forms 233
- CHAPTER 11 Performance Assessment of Skill and Product Outcomes 261
- CHAPTER 12 Assessing Affective Outcomes 303
- CHAPTER 13 Classroom Perspectives on Standardized Testing 329

PART FOUR

Communicating about Student Achievement 361

- CHAPTER 14 Communicating with Report Card Grades 363
- CHAPTER 15 Innovative Communication Using Reports, Conferences, and Portfolios 397
- CHAPTER 16 Creating a Positive, Constructive Classroom Assessment Environment 429

Table of Contents

PART ONE

Understanding the Classroom Assessment Context	1
<hr/>	
CHAPTER 1 A Principled View of Classroom Assessment	3
CHAPTER OBJECTIVES	3
ASSESSMENT LITERACY IS THE KEY	6
The Positive Results	7
The Things That Can Go Wrong	8
Our Common Mission	8
A SET OF GUIDING PRINCIPLES	9
Principle 1: Clear Thinking and Effective Communication	9
Principle 2: Teachers in Charge	10
Principle 3: Students as Key Users	11
Principle 4: Clear and Appropriate Targets	12
Principle 5: High-quality Assessment	12
Principle 6: Attention to Interpersonal Impact	14
Principle 7: Assessment as Instruction	15
CHAPTER SUMMARY: THE MATTER OF ASSESSMENT COMPETENCE	16
EXERCISES TO ADVANCE YOUR LEARNING	16

CHAPTER 2	Changing Assessment Times Bring New Assessment Responsibilities	19
CHAPTER OBJECTIVES	19	
CHAPTER ROADMAP	20	
A BRIEF HISTORY LESSON	21	
Formal Education Optional	21	
Ethnic Diversity	22	
School Serves Social Function	22	
A “New” Kind of Test	22	
AN ERA OF DISCONNECTED EFFORTS	23	
Differentiated Functions	23	
Psychometric Development	23	
The March Toward Layers of Standardized Testing	24	
Reasons for Minimal Impact	26	
Summary of the Old Era	27	
THE FORCES OF ASSESSMENT CHANGE	28	
The Demand for Accountability	28	
The Forces for Change	29	
The Search for Clear and Appropriate Achievement Targets	31	
The Search for More Complete Assessments	32	
CLASSROOM ASSESSMENT IN TRANSITION	33	
Changing Roles	33	
Changing the Practices	34	
CHAPTER SUMMARY: A TIME OF TRANSITION	36	
EXERCISES TO ADVANCE YOUR LEARNING	37	
CHAPTER 3	Understanding the Critical Roles of Assessment	39
CHAPTER OBJECTIVES	39	
CHAPTER ROADMAP	40	
CONTRASTING CLASSROOM AND LARGE-SCALE STANDARDIZED ASSESSMENT	42	
A View from the Past	42	
More Differences in Assumptions	43	
More Differences in Methodology	45	
ASSESSMENTS THAT INFORM INSTRUCTIONALLY RELEVANT DECISIONS	48	
USING ASSESSMENT AS A TEACHING TOOL	53	

Methods That Have Stood the Test of Time	53
New Methods for Changing Times	54
CHAPTER SUMMARY: SOUND ASSESSMENT BECOMES ESSENTIAL	55
EXERCISES TO ADVANCE YOUR LEARNING	56

CHAPTER 4	Specifying Achievement Targets	59
------------------	---------------------------------------	-----------

CHAPTER OBJECTIVES	59
CHAPTER ROADMAP	60
CHALLENGING OUTDATED VALUES ABOUT OUTCOMES	61
Three Difficult Challenges	61
The Benefits of Clear and Appropriate Targets	63
TYPES OF ACHIEVEMENT TARGETS	67
Knowledge Targets	67
Reasoning Targets	69
Skill Targets	69
Product Targets	70
Affective Targets	70
Summary of Targets	71
SOURCES OF INFORMATION ABOUT ACHIEVEMENT TARGETS	72
Professional Preparation	72
Community Involvement in Setting Targets	74
Building a Team Effort	76
A Note of Caution	77
COMMUNICATING ABOUT VALUED ACHIEVEMENT TARGETS	77
CHAPTER SUMMARY: CLEAR TARGETS ARE KEY	78
EXERCISES TO ADVANCE YOUR LEARNING	79

CHAPTER 5	Understanding the Assessment Alternatives	81
------------------	--	-----------

CHAPTER OBJECTIVES	81
CHAPTER ROADMAP	83
THE ASSESSMENT OPTIONS	84
Selected Response Assessment	84
Essay Assessments	85
Performance Assessments	85
Personal Communication as Assessment	86
Some Thoughts about Methods	87

MATCHING METHODS WITH TARGETS	87
Assessing Mastery of Content Knowledge	90
Assessing Reasoning and Problem Solving	91
Assessing Mastery of Skills	93
Assessing Proficiency in Creating Products	94
Assessing Affective Outcomes	94
CHAPTER SUMMARY: TARGETS AND METHODS MUST MATCH	95
EXERCISES TO ADVANCE YOUR LEARNING	96

PART TWO

Understanding Assessment Methods 97

CHAPTER 6	Selected Response Assessment: Still Useful after All These Years	99
CHAPTER OBJECTIVES		99
CHAPTER ROADMAP		101
SUBJECTIVITY IN SELECTED RESPONSE ASSESSMENT		102
The Importance of Knowing How to Assess		103
MATCHING SELECTED RESPONSE ASSESSMENTS TO ACHIEVEMENT TARGETS		105
Matching Method to Target		105
Summary of Target Matches		107
DEVELOPING SELECTED RESPONSE ASSESSMENTS		107
Context Factors		108
THE STEPS IN TEST DEVELOPMENT		109
Step 1: Preparing a Test Plan		110
Step 2: Selecting Elements to Be Tested		114
Additional Thoughts on Steps 1 and 2		118
Step 3: Building Test Items from Propositions		118
Selecting from Among the Four Item Formats		125
Working Backwards to Verify Test Quality		127
Barriers to Sound Selected Response Assessment		127
INCLUDING STUDENTS IN THE SELECTED RESPONSE ASSESSMENT PROCESS		128
CHAPTER SUMMARY: PRODUCTIVE SELECTIVE RESPONSE ASSESSMENT		130
EXERCISES TO ADVANCE YOUR LEARNING		131