

Teachers' Guide to Assessment



Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn
CATHOLIC EDUCATION OFFICE

AIS
ACT
Association of Independent Schools
of the ACT Incorporated



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Education and Training

This paper has been written as a support to ACT teachers in developing and clarifying understanding about assessment practices. The research used to underpin the content of this paper is listed in the bibliography. As implementation of the Australian Curriculum continues, including the work of assessment, the ACT is committed to ensuring best understanding and expertise in assessment practice.

This Guide Is To Be Placed In The Bridging Document Folder

Introduction

The arrival of the Australian Curriculum is a positive catalyst for teachers to engage in developing better understanding of what assessment is and for, and to gain confidence in their assessment practice. Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam, in their article *Inside the Black Box* (1998) write, "There is a wealth of research evidence that the everyday practice of assessment in classrooms is beset with problems and short-comings". Current research supports this claim, indicating that, when teachers reflect on their teaching practice, the area where they are least confident is that of assessment.

In the ACT a Cross Sectoral Assessment Working Party was formed in 2011 to consider how best to support teachers in developing effective assessment practice in the context of implementing the Australian Curriculum. The Working Party engaged in research about assessment practices in other jurisdictions and countries. There are many excellent books and articles about assessment and the Working Party decided to synthesise the best and clearest material into a paper that would support teachers in their work. This document is the result.

One particular thread running through much of the research is worthy of particular mention. It is the link between assessment processes and students' motivation to learn. When feedback and assessment emphasise progress and achievement, students are motivated to keep learning. Negative comments and/or comparisons with others who have achieved better results, are far less likely to motivate learners. Feedback that is specific, respectful, timely and constructive is likely to enhance learning and performance.

As we know well, the most important factor in students' learning is the teacher. We hope this document helps teachers in their daily work.

The Cross Sectoral Assessment Working Party, June 2011

The role of the Quality Teaching model

During 2008 the ACT Education and Training Directorate chose the Quality Teaching model as the preferred pedagogical framework for all public schools. The Directorate had obtained a licence from the NSW Department of Education and Training to use the model (called a framework in NSW) but the licence limited the Directorate to using it only with public schools. The Canberra Catholic Education system was already working with the model given their jurisdiction in NSW as a part of the Canberra-Goulburn Diocese. The Directorate gave a complete set of all the ACT Quality Teaching resources to each independent school and later informed all independent schools of how to obtain the resources through the NSW Department of Education website.

This background information is important because the public, Catholic and independent sectors all support the use of the Quality Teaching model with regard to classroom and assessment practices, and as the pedagogical model underpinning curriculum delivery P – 12. **In this paper we assert that the best preparation for understanding and delivering effective and authentic assessment processes begins with designing high quality assessment tasks and instruments.** As work continues in the ACT on the issues of implementing the Australian Curriculum, using the Achievement Standards and pursuing best practice in assessment, the Quality Teaching model will be an important part of professional conversations, professional learning and professional practice.

Assessment, Australian Curriculum Achievement Standards and reporting in ACT schools

The revised Australian Curriculum Achievement Standards were approved by the Ministerial Council for Education, Early childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEEYDA) on 14 October 2011.

The then ACT Minister for Education and Training, Andrew Barr MLA, announced:

- that ACT schools K-10 will use the ACARA achievement standard as a C standard from 2012 (note that the Australian Curriculum calls Kindergarten, i.e. the year before Year 1, Foundation)
- that the C standard will be used for assessment and reporting for those subjects that are in their second year of implementation of the Australian Curriculum in 2012. These subjects are: K-6 English and Science; Year 7 English, Mathematics, Science and History; Year 9 English, Mathematics and Science.

Achievement Standards describe the *quality* of learning (depth of understanding, extent of knowledge, and sophistication of skill) expected of students at each year level from Kindergarten to Year 10. Achievement Standards aid consistency of assessment and reporting across states and territories. Each achievement standard makes explicit the quality of learning necessary for students to be well able to progress to the next level. Teachers, using a range of assessment strategies, will ensure that each student has a portfolio of work that is evidence of what the student has achieved.

During 2011 schools took the opportunity to explore, in depth, ideas and research about assessment. The aim of this work was to build consistency of beliefs and practice about assessment and consistency of judgement when assessing student achievement against the Achievement Standards. In 2012 schools will continue this work.

ACARA has determined that education authorities and individual schools will decide, in consultation with parents and communities, the style and format of reporting that best meets local needs and circumstances, including provision of any additional elements of student reports. The ACT will pursue these issues, collaborating cross sectorally. The continued emphasis in ACT schools is the development of high quality assessment tasks and consistency of judgement around student work.

Defining assessment

Assessment is the process of gathering and interpreting evidence to make judgements about student learning. It is the crucial link between learning outcomes, content and teaching and learning activities. Assessment is used by learners and their teachers to decide where the learners are at in their learning, where they need to go, and how best to get there. The purpose of assessment is to improve learning, inform teaching, help students achieve the highest standards they can and provide meaningful reports on students' achievement.

Assessment: from the Latin root assidere, to sit beside another.

- What do we want the students to learn?
- Why does the learning matter?
- What do we want the students to do/produce?
- How well do we expect them to do it?

(The ACT Quality Teaching model, Assessment Practice Guide)

Types of assessment

Assessment can be both a formative and summative process. Formative assessment is used to provide feedback to students and teachers to promote further learning.

Summative assessment contributes to the judgement of student learning for reporting and certification purposes.

- **formative assessment** – is assessment *for* learning. It is used at the beginning of an instructional period and during the process of instruction as teachers check for student understanding. Diagnostic tools determine what students already know and where there are gaps and misconceptions. Formative assessment also includes assessment *as* learning, where students reflect on and monitor their own progress. The information gained guides teachers' decisions in how to enhance teaching and learning. Formative assessment enables students to learn through the process of feedback and opportunities to practise and improve. As students reflect on and monitor their progress this process effectively becomes assessment as learning and contributes to students planning future learning goals.
- **summative assessment** – is assessment *of* learning. It is used towards and at the end of the instruction period. Teachers document the culmination of students' learning achievements through tasks that invite students to demonstrate their mastery and knowledge of the course content. Summative assessment data provides teachers with information about how effective teaching strategies have been, time needed for instruction and how to improve teaching for future students.

Assessment of and for students' learning is the process of gathering and analysing information as evidence about what students know, can do and understand. It is part of an ongoing cycle that includes planning, documenting and evaluating students' learning.

(Adapted from The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia, p.17)

Principles underpinning effective assessment practice

In 2002 the Assessment Reform Group (Cambridge University, School of Education) produced ten principles that are foundational to assessment for learning.

Assessment should:

- be regarded as a key professional skill for teachers
- be part of effective planning of teaching and learning
- promote commitment to learning goals and a shared understanding of the criteria by which they are assessed
- be recognised as central to classroom practice
- focus on how students learn
- provide constructive guidance about how to improve
- develop learners' capacity for self-assessment so that they can become reflective and self-managing
- take account of the importance of learner motivation
- be sensitive and constructive because any assessment has an emotional impact
- recognise the full range of achievement of all learners

Best practice in assessment

Best practice includes:

- clear understanding that the purpose of assessment is for students to develop and improve in their learning and for teachers to plan and teach effectively
- the use of diagnostic tools to determine what the students already know, understand and can do
- ongoing assessment through a variety of differentiated tasks and strategies, both formal and informal, so that sufficient evidence is gathered to make sound judgements about individual students' learning
- students being actively involved in, and having some control over, their learning
- learning goals that are explicit in that students know what they are learning, why the learning is important, what products are expected, and how they will be assessed
- assessment tasks that are differentiated through offering quality choices of ways for students to demonstrate knowledge, understanding and skills
- assessment tasks and strategies that are fair and enable all students to demonstrate their learning achievements
- the giving of specific and timely feedback, for example, through conversations between students and the teacher, written feedback, peer assessment and self-assessment
- students' work being discussed and moderated through shared concepts and language
- assessment tasks that are integrated/embedded in instruction so that they are a planned and essential part of teaching and learning
- authentic assessment tasks that align with the ways such knowledge and skills would be used in the real world

Misunderstandings about assessment

Misunderstandings about assessment include the following:

Assessment is only the 'test' at the end of a unit of work or series of lessons.

This ignores the importance of formative assessment.

Assessment is an auditing exercise about what students do and don't know or can and can't do, by testing student memory, asking trick questions etc.

This fails to align teaching objectives (involving high intellectual quality) with assessment tasks.

Assessment focuses on what is easiest to measure.

This fails to address what is important to learn.

Assessment is an average of performances across a teaching period.

This fails to reflect that learning is a journey, and results closest to the end, when carefully designed summative assessment tasks are used, should reveal an accurate 'final' achievement.

Group assessment is giving the same mark or grade to each participant in a group exercise.

This ignores the importance of validly assessing each student's work within a group process.

Assessment is the same as grading.

This confuses the purposes of both grading and assessment. They are not synonymous because assessment focuses on gathering information about student learning while grading is an end point judgement about achievement.

Giving zero for unsubmitted work in the context of a learning achievement is fair.

This confuses the purpose of assessing learning with the different purpose of getting students to submit work and is arithmetically erroneous.

Assessment for an achievement grade includes student dispositions and behaviours.

This confuses the purpose of assessment of learning. Attendance, effort, attitudes etc should be reported on separately from achievement.

Using one assessment for a multitude of purposes is like using a hammer for everything from brain surgery to pile driving.

(Walt Honey, 1991, quoted in Assessment as Learning by Lorna Earl, 2003)

Assessment strategies include:

- **anecdotal records:** objective narrative records of student performances, strengths, needs, progress and negative/positive behaviour
- **authentic tasks:** activities that are genuine and purposeful. These can include real-life shopping tasks, measuring a ball-park, designing a home, building a bridge or tower, writing about significant issues and so on
- **checklists, scales or charts:** identification and recording of students' achievement can be through rubric levels, letter grade or numerical value, or simply by acceptable/unacceptable
- **conferences:** meetings between the student/parent/teacher and others where progress is checked and goals for growth are established and agreed upon
- **contracts:** agreements or goals (verbal or written) set by the teacher/parents and the student
- **games:** games are excellent opportunities for simulations and small and large group assessment
- **diagnostic inventories:** student responses to a series of questions or statements in any field, either verbally or in writing. These responses may indicate an ability or interest in a particular field.
- **peer evaluation:** assessment by students about one another's performance relative to stated criteria and program outcomes
- **portfolios:** collections of student work that exhibit the students' efforts, progress and achievements in one or more areas
- **rubrics:** a set of guidelines for measuring achievement. Rubrics should state the learning outcome(s) with clear performance criteria and a rating scale or checklist.

- **self-evaluations:** student reflections about her/his own achievements and needs relative to program goals
- **simulations:** the use of problem-solving, decision-making and role-playing tasks
- **student journals:** personal records of, and responses to activities, experiences, strengths, interests and needs
- **student profiles:** a compilation of data which may include student work samples
- **student-led conferences:** where the student plans, implements, conducts and evaluates a conference regarding their learning achievements. The purpose of the conference is to provide a forum in which students can talk about their school work with parents/carers and demonstrate their growth towards being self-directed lifelong learners.
- **teacher observations:** regular, first-hand observations of students, documented by the teacher

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