

INVOLVING STUDENTS IN ASSESSMENT

WHY INVOLVE STUDENTS?

Involving students in the creation of the criteria and rubrics needed to assess students' current work may significantly improve the quality of your assessment in a number of ways (Johnson & F. Johnson, 2000). One of the most important impacts of involvement is understanding the assessment criteria and rubrics. Involving students in this process tends to increase their understanding of the criteria and rubrics as well as what is expected of them in the learning situation. Because the criteria and rubrics represent students' own thinking, students have the ability to understand them.

Unless students take the assessment seriously and strive to provide valid and reliable performances, the assessment is not worth doing. Involving students tends to increase their sense of ownership for the procedures, criteria, and rubrics. Individuals tend to be open to and interested in using assessment procedures, criteria, and rubrics when they feel a sense of ownership whereas they tend to be closed to and reject assessment procedures, criteria, and rubrics when they are imposed on them by others. For many students, teacher-conducted assessments are threatening. Defensiveness by the students can result in resistance to and distortion of feedback concerning the quality of their performances. Student defensiveness can be reduced by increasing their ownership of the assessment criteria and rubrics.

Involving students tends to increase students' commitment to implement the assessment procedures in a high-quality way. Compared with teachers explaining assessment procedures or having student committees help plan the assessment, direct involvement of all students in planning the assessment results in stronger commitment to implement the procedures. Individuals tend to be committed to procedures they have helped plan whereas they tend to reject, subvert, and resist procedures imposed on them by others.

Involving students can increase the quality of the criteria and rubrics. In general, the more students participate, the more resources are available and, consequently, the higher is the quality of the resulting criteria and rubrics. Students may be especially valuable for planning valid and reliable criteria and rubrics because they have the unique perspective of having been assessed many, many times.

Finally, involving students can increase their positive attitudes toward the assessment. Involving students in planning assessments tends to result in public commitment to complete assignments at a high level of quality and in the awareness that classmates are making the same commitment. What tends to result is greater motivation to learn and more positive attitudes toward learning and assessment.

Once the students help create the criteria and rubrics, they may be involved in using them to assess their own and their classmates' work. There are several advantages to such involvement (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1998a).

First, the assessment of classmates' work is a powerful teaching tool. Students may learn more from assessing their classmates' work than from the feedback they receive on their own work. By determining the quality of a classmate's topic sentences, for example, the student may learn more about how to write a good topic sentence than he or she does from receiving feedback about his or her own topic sentences. Just as true as the saying "Whoever explains, learns" may be the expression "Whoever assesses, learns." In addition, participating in assessments directs students' attention toward the intended outcomes of instruction. It requires students' to learn at the levels of understanding, application, and interpretation (as opposed to the level of knowledge simply), thereby increasing their retention and transfer of what is being taught. Having students use the criteria and rubrics to assess classmates' work increases the likelihood that students learn, retain, and transfer what is being taught.

Second, involving students can increase the frequency and quality of self-assessments. Assessing the work of classmates helps students gain insight into the quality of their own work, the degree of skill they have in various areas, and any misconceptions they have that need correction. Self-assessments tend to provide students with short-term goals, clarify the steps to be taken to complete assignments, and provide feedback concerning their learning progress.

Third, involving students in conducting assessments makes assessments more manageable. The limits on teachers' time restrict the frequency with which teacher assessments can take place. When students conduct peer assessments, the frequency with which assessments can take place increases dramatically. A teacher, for example, may only have time to assess students' writing once a month whereas students can assess each other's writing every day. Two ways in which students may be involved in the assessment process are helping create the criteria and rubrics used to assess students' work and communicating to their parents and other interested stakeholders the results of their efforts to learn.

HOW TO INVOLVE STUDENTS IN CREATING CRITERIA AND RUBRICS

The first step in involving students in creating the criteria and rubrics is to define the assessment procedure (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1998a). The procedure could be quizzes or examinations, standardized tests, written compositions, oral presentations, projects or experiments, surveys, historical projects, or learning logs and journals.

The second step is involving students in developing a set of criteria to use in evaluating the performance produced by students. A **criterion** is a predetermined standard used to assess a performance. Involving students in creating the criteria and rubrics for assessing students' efforts does not mean turning over total control to students. You, the teacher, have a responsibility for ensuring that criteria critical for instructional objectives are included. Because you have a clear idea of what some of the criteria should be, however, does not mean that you have to set all or even most of the criteria. You may want to reach an agreement with students whereby you set one-third or one-half of the criteria and they decide on the rest. The steps for involving students in setting criteria are to have students (a) brainstorm a potential list of criteria and (b) rank the criteria from most important to least important. Involve the whole class in deciding what criteria should be used in assessing students' efforts. You, of course, should ensure that criteria critical for instructional objectives are included.

The third step is to construct a rubric for each criterion. A **rubric** is a list of indicators of different levels of a criterion being used to assess a performance. A rubric is usually a scale ranking from *poor* to *good*. Rubrics are needed to assess the quality and

quantity of each student's performance for each criterion. Students should construct a rubric for each criterion. Begin with the criterion ranked most important by listing indicators of very poor, poor, fair, good, and very good levels of performance. Once the rubrics are developed, they must be field tested and refined before they are adopted. Field testing consists of two steps: (a) having assessors analyze exemplary and very poor student performances to ensure each rubric accurately measures the students' strengths and weaknesses and (b) applying each rubric to a set of sample performances to ensure it works. Once the rubrics have been field tested, they may be adopted.

The fourth step is to train assessors so that they are cooriented, consistent, and reliable in their use of the criteria and rubrics. Assessors have to be able to apply the same rubric in the same way at different times. Different assessors have to be able to apply the same rubric in the same way. One procedure for training is to have assessors (a) score a student performance together as a group, discussing how the performance ranks on the rubric for each criterion, (b) score a set of student performances separately, with each group member scoring the performances on his or her own and then comparing the scoring to see whether team members are using the rubrics in the same way, and (c) have at least two group members score each performance and discuss any differences in their scoring until they agree.

The fifth step is to use the results of the assessment to plan how to improve the instructional program. The sixth step is to improve continuously the criteria, the rubrics, and the assessors' skills in using the rubrics to assess the quality and quantity of student learning. Continuous improvement is needed to ensure the subjective definition of criteria and rubrics do not drift or change. **Scoring criteria drift** exists when, after assessing numerous performances, the assessor's definition of the criteria (and rubrics) changes or is modified. As the assessor gains more and more experience a new idiosyncratic rubric is created. Ongoing training is needed to recalibrate periodically assessors' use of the scoring rubrics: just because assessors achieve a high level of interrater reliability at one time does not mean it will continue forever. Criteria and rubrics can sometimes be improved by enriching them with insight and information from other classes and schools.

In addition to retraining assessors periodically, criteria and rubrics need to change as the academic year progresses. What is expected of students in September is different from what is expected in January. As students master more and more knowledge and skills, the criteria and rubrics used to assess the quality of their work needs to become more demanding and reflect higher standards. Activity 16.1 guides you through these six steps in involving students in the assessment process.

STUDENT-LED CONFERENCES

The purpose of the postevaluation conference is to review the student's progress in achieving his or her learning goals (Bailey & Guskey, 2001). In the postevaluation conference the student explains his or her level of achievement (what the student learned and failed to learn) to interested parties (cooperative learning group, teacher, parents), which naturally leads to the next goal-setting conference. Student-led conferences with parents are one example of a postevaluation conference.

Student-led conferences involve three groups of individuals: parents, students, and teachers. They are a modification of the traditional teacher-parent conference. Instead of the teacher explaining to the parent what the student has been studying and how well the student is learning, the teacher (a) helps the student prepare a portfolio and a presentation, (b) helps the student explain to his or her parent what has been learned, and (c) assesses how well the conference went. There are three phases to student-led conferences.

ACTIVITY 16.1 ■ CREATING RUBRICS TO ASSESS STUDENT LEARNING

Step 1. Define the assessment procedure. Indicate on the checklist below the procedures the team will use to assess students' learning.

- | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Quizzes, tests, examinations | <input type="checkbox"/> Homework, extra credit |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Compositions | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Presentations | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Projects, experiments, surveys, historical research | |

Step 2. Develop a set of criteria to use in evaluating students performance. A checklist of steps for doing so follows.

- ☐ a. Brainstorm a potential list of criteria
- ☐ b. Rank order the criteria from most important to least important.

Step 3. Construct rubrics. Rubrics are needed to assess the quality and quantity of each student's performance for each criterion. A checklist for constructing a rubric for each criterion follows.

- ☐ a. Begin with the criterion ranked most important.
- ☐ b. List indicators of very poor, poor, fair, good, and very good levels of performance.
- ☐ c. Field test the rubric by applying it to examples of exemplary and very poor student performances to ensure the rubric accurately measures students' strengths and weaknesses.
- ☐ d. Field test the rubric by applying the rubric to a set of sample performances.

Step 4. Train students to use the criteria and rubrics. Make sure they are co-oriented, consistent, and reliable in their use of the criteria and rubrics. Assessors have to be able to apply the same rubric in the same way at different times. Different assessors have to be able to apply the same rubric in the same way. A checklist for one training procedure follows.

- ☐ a. Score a student performance together as a group, discussing how the performance should be assessed on each criterion.
- ☐ b. Score a set of student performances separately, with each team member scoring the performances on his or her own. Then compare the scoring to see whether team members are using the rubrics in the same way.
- ☐ c. Score all student performances with at least two team members scoring each performance. Any differences in the scoring are then discussed until two or more team members agree on the scoring of each student performance.

(continued)

ACTIVITY 16.1 *Continued*

Step 5. Plan how to improve the instructional program. Use the assessment results as the basis for your plans. List your suggestions below.

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____

Step 6. Continually improve in using the rubrics to assess the quality and quantity of student learning. Improve the criteria, the rubrics, and the assessors' skills in using rubrics.

- _____ a. Beware scoring criteria drift.
 - _____ b. Periodically recalibrate team members' use of the scoring rubrics.
 - _____ c. Search for exemplary criteria and rubrics other classes and schools are using.
 - _____ b. Use these examples as benchmarks to improve your classes' assessment practices.
-

Phase I: Preparing for the Conference

There are five procedures for students to do before a conference.

1. Make an invitation for parents to attend the conference with the date, time, and place specified.
2. Create a portfolio.
3. Practice the introduction to the conference.
4. Role play the conference to practice their presentations.
5. Set up the room for the conference.

The cooperative learning group prepares each member for the conference by helping him or her compile a portfolio. The portfolio includes the student's (a) best work in the various subject areas, (b) progress reaching his or her learning goals, and (c) efforts to help groupmates reach their goals. Once the portfolio is constructed, the group helps the student prepare effective presentation aids and practice and refine the conference presentation. In preparing and practicing the presentation, students become well rehearsed in presenting their work and the rubrics used to evaluate it. They master the language needed to communicate their learning goals and academic efforts, and learn how to describe their progress.

Phase II: Conducting the Conference

Each student, with the teacher serving as coleader and coach, presents his or her work to his or her parents and discusses the next steps he or she will take to improve academically. Placing students in charge of the conference makes each student individually accountable, encourages students to take pride in their work, and encour-

ages student–parent communication about school performance. A procedure for conducting the conference follows.

1. The student picks up the portfolio, goes to the table designated for the conference, and sits down with his or her parents.
2. The student introduces the portfolio to his or her parents, explains what the portfolio is, and gives an overview of what it contains. A portfolio organizer and table of contents helps this part of the presentation.
3. The student describes each section of the portfolio, explaining the rationale for why each work sample was included and why it represents a significant indicator of learning. A student, for example, might show writing samples from September, October, and November to show how his or her skills have been improving.
4. The teacher moves from conference to conference, monitoring the presentations and giving assistance when it is needed. When the teacher arrives, the student introduces the teacher to his or her parents.
5. The student concludes the presentation with a summary of what has been accomplished and what is yet to be done.
6. The student asks his or her parents to write any comments or suggestions they have for the student and to complete a reaction form to the conference. If the parents wish to have a conference only with the teacher, they may sign up to do so.
7. The student returns the portfolio to its place and reflects on how well the conference went.

Phase III: Assessing the Quality of the Conference

An assessment of the student's progress is made by (a) the student, (b) the cooperative learning group, (c) the teacher, and (d) the parents.

SUMMARY

Few actions are more important to conducting a high-quality assessment than involving students. Although students can be involved in each step of the assessment process, two steps in the process to ensure student involvement are particularly important: students developing the criteria and rubrics for assessing their work and students communicating the results of their efforts to learn to parents and other interested stakeholders.

ASSESSMENT RUBRIC

Student: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____

Project: _____

Write the indicators for each of the five levels of performance for each criterion.

	Indicators				
Criteria	Very Poor	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good
Criterion 1					
1.					
2.					
3.					
Criterion 2					
1.					
2.					
3.					
Criterion 3					
1.					
2.					
3.					
Criterion 4					
1.					
2.					
3.					

Criterion 5					
1.					
2.					
3.					

Comments:

PORTFOLIO ORGANIZER

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____

Reading	Writing
Science	Math
Social Studies	Physical Education

I believe I do the following well:

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____

Your comments and suggestions:
