

Putting students on a winning streak

Altering a school goal to reflect student growth gives meaningful feedback to students and leads to effective instructional changes.

by Debbie Cullum

“Historically, a major role of assessment has been to detect and highlight differences in student learning in order to rank students according to their achievement” (p.1). This type of assessment worked for me as I was a student moving through the system. I was driven and motivated by the marks and grades but as Stiggins points out in his article *Assessment Through the Student’s Eyes* (2007) this type of assessment has produced winners and losers and I was just fortunate to be a winner. Many of my colleagues had the same mindset – “it worked for me, what’s wrong with assessing the way I was assessed?” But as research evolves and we know more about assessment we must “embrace a new vision of assessment that can tap the

wellspring of confidence, motivation and learning potential that resides within every student” (p.1). Every student deserves to feel like a winner which can lead to more student ownership of their learning.

“Today’s schools are less focused on merely sorting students and more focused on helping *all* students succeed in meeting standards” (p.1). When I first came to Prairiedale the school goal around reading was related to a percentage of students fully meeting expectations. Many members of the staff, including myself, were not comfortable using a number because that then meant that some students would be *losers* even though they may have made huge gains over the year. We changed the goal to reflect student growth. The goal now reads – to improve stu-

dent’s reading by demonstrating at least one year’s growth. Staff were much happier with this as it reflected more of the B.C. Primary Program’s philosophy of working with each student at the level he/she is at and moving him/her forward not just pushing children through because they are in grade 2 so they get grade 2 reading instruction regardless if that is where they are reading at or not. Giving student ownership of their learning by using assessment tools like the PM Benchmarks and sharing results with the students has helped us to give meaningful feedback to the students and helped to make changes in instruction. I feel that we have become much better at sharing individual progress with our students throughout the year so they see themselves improving. We

Know more:



Stiggins, R. (2007) *Assessment Through the Student’s Eyes*. Educational Leadership, 64(8), 22-26.
Internet address: http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational_leadership/may07/vol64/num08/



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can definitely continue to work on giving meaningful feedback so students' know what their next step is in learning to ensure their success.

"Assessment for learning begins when teachers share achievement targets with students, presenting those expectations in student-friendly language accompanied by examples of exemplary student work" (p.3). Going around the school I have seen and heard teachers sharing learning intentions and seen criteria posted. Staff is beginning to incorporate the use of learning intentions and criteria across the curriculum. As we as a staff are new on this formative assessment journey so too are the students. Some of the comments I got from talking with students about what it is like when their teacher shares learning intentions and the criteria have been made clear included:

"What you're doing is getting

more clear as you have the criteria" ... learning intentions and criteria are "helping me by learning what you're suppose to do and how you're suppose to do it" Julian, age 8 (*just about 9*). A grade 2 student shared with me that she was glad and excited because the learning intentions and criteria "helped us out with our stuff." Owen in grade 2 said that having criteria made him mad because "I have to do it a certain way but then I just do it because I know what to do." With time and practice I know the students will become much better at articulating their learning and how formative assessment is helping them.

Having spent time this year learning about formative assessment

and making changes within our school, I am pleased to see that we are communicating more with our students about their learning and have really focused on sharing with the students what we are intending for them to learn and what fully meeting expectations will look like. "Rather than sorting students into winners and losers, assessment for learning can put all students on a winning streak" (p.1). It is my hope that by continuing to use formative assessment practices that all of our students will be winners and we will continue to move from a sorting focus where there is success for some to a learning focus where there can be success for all. 

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