As student achievement data are increasingly included in teacher evaluations, principals are responsible for ensuring that the results of classroom-based assessments are included in those data. Integrating formative, classroom-based assessments into every student learning experience is a practical way to enhance student learning and give teachers valuable feedback about student progress. Those assessments generate data that teachers and principals can collect over the course of a school year to consider along with data from standardized tests. Our experience has shown that a particular type of assessment—“reflective assessment”—reaps large rewards for both students and teachers.

Reflective assessment is a form of metacognition, a concept that is growing in popularity in educational circles—and with good reason. Simply put, metacognition is “thinking about thinking” (Costa, 2001) or what we know about what we know. Metacognition involves “the critical revisiting of the learning process” (Georghiades, 2004, p. 171) and is key to turning classroom-based assessment activities into learning experiences for students (Chappuis, 2005; Stiggins, 2008). Metacognition can encapsulate a variety of strategies and approaches. Because of the theoretical and research evidence that underlies reflective assessment strategies, they should be on the front burner not only for teachers but also for principals.

Reflective assessment is a formative approach that emphasizes the joint participation of teachers and students in the assessment process. Consistent with the vision of a teacher being a “co-partner and guide in a common enterprise” (Dewey, 1964, p. 10), reflective assessment strategies are designed to serve students as well as teachers. As students become involved in self-assessment activities as part of the classroom experience, they assume ownership of their learning. Simultaneously, the
feedback that the teacher receives helps him or her design instruction that meets the needs of students.

Reflective Strategies
One of the reasons that reflective assessment is gaining popularity in classrooms and schools is that it is not an add-on. Instead, it is a value-added tool that builds teachers’ and principals’ understanding of how to design and implement strategies that increase student achievement and that can be incorporated into the already-established daily routine of the classroom. In fact, many teachers who begin using reflective assessment soon realize that it is a perfect way to make good use of what had previously been dead time in their classroom.

Each of the following strategies has merit, but they must be undertaken regularly to build consistency for the students. The teacher must provide some guiding feedback to students in a timely way and create a classroom environment in which students are comfortable admitting to having questions or lacking understanding without fear of repercussions or belittlement (Ellis, 2010).

“I Learned” Statements
At the close of class, with perhaps three minutes remaining, the teacher asks students to write “I learned...” on a sheet of paper and then complete the sentence. Students are encouraged to keep writing until the end of the period. While students write, the teacher can handle some of his or her daily administrative tasks for the class, such as returning papers or taking attendance. As students exit the room, the teacher collects the “I Learned” statements and then reviews what the students wrote. This strategy is most successful when the teacher provides feedback to the students about what the teacher is looking for. This can be done with a quick check, a plus mark, a smiley face, and so forth.

A great way to extend this strategy is to share anonymous student examples with the class by using a document camera or transcribing the example onto a transparency (Evans, 2009). This not only cues students into what they should do when reflecting, but also it provides a seamless, timely, and appropriate review of previously learned material, thereby providing context for the current day’s learning.

Any time the teacher uses this strategy, he or she gets a concise yet informative glimpse into the learning of his or her students, which subsequently informs instructional practice.

Clear and Unclear Windows
As with “I Learned” statements, students use the clear and unclear windows strategy to reflect on the day’s lessons. This particular reflective assessment can take three to five minutes at the close of the class period.

Students make two “windowpanes” on a sheet of paper by creating two columns. The left-hand column is titled “Clear,” and the right-hand column is titled “Unclear.” In the left-hand column, students record their thoughts and reflections about their learning, focusing on what they definitely understand about the day’s lesson or activities. A great way to contextualize this is to ask students, “What from today’s lesson would you be able to teach to another class?” In the right-hand column, students should note things that were not clear to them in the lesson, such as questions about particular concepts, terms that did not make sense, and sections of the day’s lesson that were missed for some reason.

The teacher can then collect the statements from students. Again, the reflective assessments
Although the main purpose for implementing reflective assessment strategies is their proven positive impact on student learning, they also offer a source for enriching the student achievement data used as part of teacher evaluations.

Inform both students and teacher. The students have the opportunity to identify what they know and what they do not yet know. The teacher also learns how closely the intended curriculum lines up with the received curriculum. Perhaps even more important, the reflection of students can directly lead to reflective practice by the teacher. This cycle of reflection and reteaching benefits everyone involved (Ellis, 2010).

The Week in Review
This particular strategy is a bit different from the “I Learned” and windows strategies, but it is equally effective at engaging students in reflection on their own learning. At the end of the week or a unit of study, the teacher engages students in a general reflection of the significant ideas and concepts from the week or unit. This can be broken into private thinking and then into pair-share and small group discussions to ensure that all students have adequate opportunities to reflect. After students share their individual reflections, the small groups agree on the most significant lessons of the unit or week. Keeping group sizes to three or four students helps ensure that participation is equitable. The group records their reflections on a list that is given to the teacher.

The lists can be used by the teacher to measure what students did or did not learn. The group discussions help students reinforce or clarify their understanding of key concepts that were presented in class. All students engage in self-analysis about where they are in their learning process. A terrific way to extend this activity is to share the lists with the full class as the starting point of a review discussion or question-and-answer session in the classroom.

Principal’s Role
Although the main purpose for implementing reflective assessment strategies is their proven positive impact on student learning, they also offer a source for enriching the student achievement data used as part of teacher evaluations. New evaluative requirements being adopted across the United States make this an opportune time for principals to lead schoolwide implementation of reflective assessment strategies. Incorporation of formative data, collected through classroom-based reflective assessments, as a complement to standardized test results will broaden the information base, as well as increase the credibility of the evaluation process.

Whatever your leadership role—superintendent, curriculum director, principal, assistant principal, or department head—those you lead trust and expect that you are knowledgeable about current trends and best instructional practices. Give them the opportunity to work with reflective assessment, and your teachers and students will be rewarded with improved student achievement and a stronger sense of cooperation in your school community. PL

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