Three paradigms of assessment: Measurement, procedure, and inquiry

When assessment becomes a process of inquiry, teachers can use it to make informed decisions.

Different assessment frameworks have different intended audiences, are used for different purposes and use different procedures to collect information (Farr, 1992). However, these are not the only differences. Each of these assessments may also involve different beliefs about the nature of knowledge, the level of teacher and student involvement, the criteria for evaluating student achievement, and the effects of these assessment frameworks on classroom instruction (Garcia & Pearson, 1994).

The differences between standardized, norm-referenced testing programs and classroom-based assessments have been written about extensively (Neill, 1993). However, as one begins to investigate the various assessment frameworks contained in the professional literature, the distinguishing features of these assessment frameworks, commonly referred to as performance-based, authentic, or classroom-based assessment, tend to overlap and blend.

Various assessment frameworks use similar procedures and data collection methodologies, and many of these “alternative” assessments do not adhere to traditional criteria of standardization, reliability, and objectivity (Linn, Baker, & Dunbar, 1991). This article is intended to help teachers and other concerned educators by providing a broader perspective concerning assessment frameworks or “paradigms” and how these assessments affect classroom practice.

Short and Burke (1994b) described three paradigms of curriculum. They suggested that curriculum could be viewed as Fact, as Activity and as Inquiry. In this description, curriculum as Fact refers to knowledge as a commodity that is “transferrable” and exists separately from the “knower,” whereas curriculum as Activity is concerned with the actual activities within the classroom, and curriculum as Inquiry is concerned with the process of creating knowledge in the classroom. As teachers begin to move from a teacher-directed curriculum, based on the transmission of “facts,” to a student-centered curriculum, based on inquiry processes, the purposes of assessment and the methods used to collect information may need to be revisited.

In reference to Short and Burke’s work, Heald-Taylor subsequently developed three paradigms for literature instruction (1996) and three paradigms for spelling instruction (1998). Heald-Taylor used Short and Burke’s curricular paradigms to analyze literature and spelling instruction to help teachers understand their own perspectives, or paradigms, concerning literacy development and classroom practices. This article will look at the distinctions between these three paradigms and use the structure suggested by Short and Burke to shed light on the differences between the various assessment frameworks that operate in schools today.

Short and Burke originally developed these three paradigms to distinguish between the tra-
ditional models of curriculum development and an inquiry model. The traditional model, curriculum as Fact, is based on modernist or positivist perspectives of reality and epistemology (Elkind, 1997). From this perspective, knowledge is viewed as an objective commodity that can be transmitted from teacher to student and subsequently measured through standardized forms of assessment (Bertrand, 1991).

In comparison, from a constructivist perspective—curriculum as Inquiry—knowledge is viewed as socially and cognitively constructed by humans as they interact with their environment (Fosnot, 1996). Knowledge is viewed as a construction and not a commodity that exists separately from the “knower.” It is this shift from a positivist perspective to a constructivist perspective that underlies the differences in the assessment paradigms to be described in this article.

The curricular paradigms described by Short and Burke are purported to represent different philosophical views of reality, knowledge, and learning (Short & Burke, 1994a). However, in describing the differences between the three paradigms in assessment, one must also look at the level of student and teacher involvement, the methods used to gather information, the purposes or goals of the assessment framework, and the intended audiences for the results. Paralleling the structure used by Short and Burke, the three paradigms of assessment are entitled (a) assessment as measurement, (b) assessment as procedure, and (c) assessment as inquiry.

In this article, I will describe how the three assessment paradigms are similar and how they are different, using various writing assessments—specifically writing portfolios—to help distinguish between the different paradigms. Next, I will present several factors that I believe support teachers making a “paradigm shift” from assessment as measurement to assessment as inquiry. Finally, I will explain several pedagogical suggestions that teachers in transition are using to change their perspectives on assessment.

Assessment as measurement

The first paradigm is assessment as measurement. As mentioned previously, this paradigm is closely associated with a positivist or modernist view of reality and knowledge. The primary instrument of this paradigm is the large-scale, norm-referenced standardized test. These standardized tests are designed to objectively measure the amount of knowledge that a student has acquired over a given time (Wineberg, 1997). A major concern for classroom teachers is whether these assessments provide the necessary information required to make day-to-day instructional and curricular decisions (Johnston, 1992).

In the assessment as measurement paradigm, knowledge is believed to exist separately from the learner, and students work to acquire it, not construct it. The student is seen as an empty vessel, a “blank slate,” ready to be filled up with knowledge. Learning is viewed as the transmission of knowledge from teacher to student while meaning is believed to reside within the text, and only one interpretation or judgment is accepted in the standardized tests (Short & Burke, 1994b).

In this paradigm, objectivity, standardization, and reliability take priority over concerns of teacher and student involvement. In these tests, the role of the classroom teacher is scripted, scoring is done by computer, and the tests are kept secured to ensure fairness. The student’s primary role in these standardized testing programs is that of test taker. In other words, there is little opportunity for self-evaluation or student reflection. The test is given and a score is tabulated. In this externally mandated form of assessment, classroom teachers have little or no input to the decision-making process and relatively little use for the results of these assessments in directing classroom and curricular decisions (Rothman, 1996).

Primarily, standardized tests are designed to compare large-scale educational programs and to provide accountability to public stakeholders (Murphy, 1997). These tests are used by school districts, state or provincial education departments, and other external stakeholders to rank and compare schools and children (Meier, 1994). Because of the high-stakes agenda associated with these standardized tests, such as funding decisions and school appropriations, they may become highly competitive (Kaufhold, 1995). These tests were not designed to support classroom instruction; rather, they were designed for large-scale educational and program evaluation (Taylor & Walton, 1997).

In the assessment as measurement paradigm, decisions about the information to be collected, and the means of evaluating this infor-
information, are usually determined by authorities outside the classroom. For example, writing ability is measured on standardized tests by means of multiple choice questions that focus primarily on issues of grammar, word choice, and spelling. The test items are designed to measure the amount of “writing knowledge” students have accumulated over their school experiences. These tests are also concerned with what a child has not learned or understood. In this way, standardized tests are concerned with deficits of knowledge as well as accumulations.

In this paradigm, portfolios or collections of authentic writing samples are not generally used to evaluate students’ writing abilities. In fact, rarely will an actual example of student writing even be evaluated in a standardized testing program.

Assessment as procedure

The assessment as procedure paradigm has elements of the assessment as measurement paradigm as well as the assessment as inquiry paradigm. In this paradigm, the primary focus is on the assessment procedures, not on the underlying purposes of the assessment program or the epistemological stance. Epistemologically, this paradigm is closely related to the assessment as measurement paradigm. Knowledge is still believed to exist independently from the learner; this knowledge can be transmitted to the student and eventually objectively measured.

The main difference between this paradigm and the assessment as measurement paradigm is that the procedures have changed to resemble qualitative data collection methods. However, even though the methods have changed, the underlying beliefs that student achievement can be objectively measured and that knowledge exists independently from the learner have not. In this way this paradigm has elements of the measurement and the inquiry paradigms.

Daly, a social philosopher, referred to a focus on procedures as “methodolatry” (as cited in Noddings, 1992). She described methodolatry as an overemphasis on the correct method of doing things, rather than a focus on the purposes for doing those things. This definition of methodolatry captures the essence of this paradigm very well. The assessment as procedure paradigm is primarily concerned with different methods for collecting data rather than new purposes or audiences for collecting this information.

In this paradigm, like the assessment as measurement paradigm, teachers and students are not directly involved in making decisions concerning the assessment procedures or the purposes for these assessments. The primary concern is with reporting information, albeit information gathered by new methods, to external stakeholders and not with directing classroom instruction (Cizek, 1998).

In Arizona, for example, many portfolio assessment projects were initiated by school district administrations in response to the state-mandated Arizona Student Assessment Program (ASAP). In response to the ASAP, many teachers were directed by their districts to keep portfolios of children’s work as part of the state writing assessment. They were required to use a “generic rubric” to score each piece of writing in the student’s portfolio and submit a final writing score for each student. This portfolio score would be in lieu of the ASAP performance-based test score. Teachers simply collected the student work, used the rubric to determine a score, and submitted the score to the state department. This was done because an authority outside the classroom directed them to do so.

Because of this situation, these portfolios often become an end in and of themselves. The portfolios were mandated and used to provide scores for the state department. Because of the external mandate, limited teacher input, and little or no staff development, these portfolios became a classroom activity, something teachers were required to administer, rather than a vehicle to promote student or teacher reflection or direct classroom decisions (Smith, 1991).

In this paradigm, the actual procedures for collecting student work, the activities themselves and not the purposes for collecting the student work, have taken priority. As a result of the ASAP, some teachers became more concerned with the type of folders to be used and the procedures for passing these portfolios on to the next grade level than with discussing the various ways these portfolios could be used to promote reflection and self-evaluation.

In the assessment as procedure paradigm, teachers are still being asked to objectively measure students’ abilities and report information in numerical form to external audiences. They re-
main outside the decision-making process, barely involved in determining the purposes for these assessments.

Many of these “assessment as procedure programs” are destined to fail because they become an end in and of themselves. Classroom teachers have not been involved in the creation of these new methods, which are not intended to provide new insights to a child’s learning. Teachers are simply burdened with another set of procedures given to them by their administration in order to provide scores for an external authority.

In effect, the procedure or method of collecting information in and of itself does not determine the assessment paradigm. This paradigm is a blend of two other paradigms. It is the purpose and the audience for these assessments, along with the epistemological stance and methods used to gather information, that helps determine the paradigm.

Assessment as inquiry

In the assessment as inquiry paradigm, assessment is based on constructivist theories of knowledge (Fosnot, 1996), student-centered learning (Altmeyer, Edelsky, & Flores, 1987), and the inquiry process (Short, Harste, & Burke, 1995). Here, the teacher uses various qualitative and quantitative assessment techniques to inquire about particular learners and their learning processes. It is a process of inquiry, and a process of interpretation, used to promote reflection concerning students’ understandings, attitudes, and literate abilities.

Not only have the procedures changed for collecting information, but so have the levels of teacher and student involvement, the purposes of these assessments, the epistemological perspective, and the audiences for the information created. In the assessment as procedure paradigm, the changes were only at the pedagogical level, concerned with new information-gathering procedures. In comparison, within this paradigm the purpose of the assessments is a deeper understanding of individual learners in their specific learning contexts. The audience has also changed from external authorities to the teachers, parents, and students involved in the classroom.

Assessment, in this paradigm, is viewed as a social, contextually specific, interpretive activity (Crafton & Burke, 1994). Knowledge is believed to be constructed by the individual within the social contexts of the learning event, rather than being acquired solely through transmission or direct instructional techniques. In this paradigm multiple interpretations are encouraged, and each learner transacts with different texts and the world to create meanings (Rosenblatt, 1979).

Using assessment as inquiry, teachers are no longer simply test administrators. Rather, teachers and students are viewed as active creators of knowledge rather than as passive recipients (Wells, 1984). Instead of using tests to measure student abilities and compare children, teachers use these classroom-based assessment procedures to facilitate learning, direct curricular decisions, and communicate more effectively with students and parents (Serafini, 1995).

In this assessment as inquiry paradigm, it is believed there is no simple prescription for each student’s ailment or a program that one can administer quickly and relatively effortlessly to eliminate inappropriate behaviors. Assessment is not viewed as an “objective” measurement process, intended for comparisons and prescriptions; rather, it is seen as a human interaction involving the human as the primary assessment instrument (Johnston, 1997). The differences between this paradigm and the assessment as procedure paradigm are in why teachers implement these procedures, not necessarily how these procedures are carried out. What is done with the information and for whom the assessments are conducted has also changed.

Instead of state or provincial education departments mandating a particular portfolio assessment program such as the ASAP example used earlier, teachers implement their own portfolio assessment process to collect samples of student work in order to make appropriate instructional decisions. These portfolios have become vehicles to promote reflection and student self-evaluation (Tierney, 1998). The methods used to collect information may be similar, but the purposes and the goals of the assessment as inquiry paradigm are quite different.

In this paradigm, portfolios are seen as a vehicle for promoting student and teacher reflection, self-evaluation, and goal setting. These portfolios are an ongoing collection of work used to understand a student’s interests, abilities, needs, and values. The artifacts in the portfolios are not usually scored or used to compare

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children against their same-age cohorts; rather, students reflect upon the contents in order to understand their academic progress and to document their growth. This has been referred to as learner-referenced assessment (Johnston, 1997).

The work included in these portfolios has been created in a more authentic context, rather than in a testing situation (Bergeron, 1996). In this paradigm, classroom instruction does not stop in order to assess learning. Assessment is viewed as part of the learning process, not as separate from it.

Portfolios are noncompetitive and attempt to focus on students’ strengths rather than their deficiencies (Murphy, 1997). The portfolios in this paradigm are used to uncover the possibilities for students, to understand each child as a whole, and to attempt to provide a window into a student’s conceptual framework and ways of seeing the world.

Educational communities would look radically different if this were the dominant theory of assessment; however, standardized tests will not disappear tomorrow. This shift from assessment as measurement to assessment as inquiry will take time, resources, administrative support, and dialogue among interested educators. Viewing assessment as inquiry would shift the focus of assessment research and practices from the standardized testing programs to the classroom itself, where assessment may be of more service in helping teachers to improve classroom learning experiences (Serafini, 1998).

Supporting teachers in transition

The shift toward an inquiry-based assessment paradigm places different demands not only upon classroom teachers, but also on school administrations, staff development programs, and teacher education models. Making changes in a teacher’s practice or educational belief system demands considerable time, research, and the opportunity for teachers to collaborate (Fullan, 1994). In general, teachers need time, support, and the opportunity to have a dialogue with colleagues. Teachers need time to read professional literature concerning assessment, engage in dialogue with other teachers in transition and have the chance to try these new procedures in a supportive, collaborative environment.

Time is already at a premium during the school day for classroom teachers. Paperwork, school site committees, staff meetings, large classroom enrollments, and shortened preparation periods all contribute to the inadequate amount of time allotted to professional development. Administrators and staff development specialists need to become more creative and supportive in finding time to help classroom teachers understand these new assessment procedures, read about their implementation, try them out in the classroom, and reflect on their progress.

Change can be threatening. Teachers, like other educators, need peer support when working through new ideas. A trusting environment where teachers can enter into open dialogue with one another is of primary importance. However, when teachers are allowed to voice their concerns and ideas, change may become less threatening.

By looking at the existing school structures and developing alternatives to the traditional school day, administrators may find new ways to create time for teachers to collaborate, research new assessment practices, and take the first step toward making a shift in their assessment beliefs and practices. When teachers and administrators come to value the changes necessary to move toward reflective practice and assessment as inquiry, it becomes easier for these groups to justify the time required to support these changes.

In making this shift, teachers will need to reevaluate not only the procedures used to generate information about their students, but also the purposes and audiences for the information collected. In this way it is a “paradigm shift,” a new stance toward assessment and knowledge as well as a change in the actual procedures used (Cambourne & Turbill, 1997).

Making the shift

In order to make this paradigm shift from assessment as measurement to assessment as inquiry, teachers need a supportive environment where administration and staff development programs provide time to collaborate with other educators, time to reflect, and the opportunity to work through the new purposes and procedures in the new assessment framework. The general support mechanism needs to be in place to allow teachers the time, dialogue, and collaboration necessary for change to occur.

Along with these general supports, specific changes in a teacher’s practice and thinking may
support a transition to this new paradigm. Teachers may want to consider the following ideas: (a) teachers as knowledgeable, reflective participants; (b) meaningful student involvement; and (c) negotiating criteria used to assess student performance. Each of these ideas will now be addressed in more detail, including some practical suggestions for teacher consideration.

**Teachers as knowledgeable, reflective participants**

The teacher as a knowledgeable, reflective participant is the foundation for the assessment as inquiry paradigm. Rather than relying on testing agencies outside the classroom context to evaluate student progress, teachers in this paradigm assume an active role in the assessment process. This new role involves using observational strategies and other classroom-based assessment procedures to gather information about student achievement.

The information collected is then interpreted by teachers on the basis of their existing knowledge and experiences. Teachers reflect on and interpret classroom experiences and student performances to make decisions about curriculum and instruction, rather than relying solely on the interpretations or scores from an externally mandated test. The more extensive the teacher knowledge base, the more effective the interpretations and subsequent instructional decisions (Fenstermacher, 1994). When teachers assume an active role in the assessment process, the audience and purposes for these assessments shift from an external focus on comparison and student ranking to an internal focus on informing classroom practice (Tierney, 1998).

Traditionally, teachers were perceived as “program operators,” and the knowledge they needed to be successful was based on how to implement prepackaged curriculum or present the lessons scripted for them in teacher manuals (Bullough & Gitlin, 1985). Subsequent traditional teacher education programs were developed around methods courses that explained how to deliver the curriculum. These notions of teacher as automated program delivery person become problematic in shifting to an assessment as inquiry paradigm.

Many teacher education programs have attempted to restructure their programs to develop teachers who assume an active, reflective role in curriculum and assessment decisions (Ross, 1989). The teacher as a reflective participant is a different stance than the transmission of direct instruction models still taught in some traditional teacher education programs (Zeichner, 1987).

If teachers are going to make the transition from assessment as measurement to assessment as inquiry, they need to know more about observing learners, learn how to make curriculum decisions based on these observations, and increase their knowledge base concerning child development and learning processes.

In the assessment as inquiry paradigm, teacher participation means that not only do teachers administer the assessments, but they also have a voice in the decisions as to how, when, and for what purposes these assessments are being used. Teachers are no longer simply the test givers, but become critically involved, deciding which assessments generate the most useful information for their instructional purposes. These new assessments are not blindly accepted, but are judged on the type of information they create, the purposes for these assessments, and the needs of the audiences involved.

As reflective participants, teachers make a commitment to learn from past experiences. It is an intentional, systematic, and deliberate focus on why things occur and what effects these experiences have on student learning (Dewey, 1933). Reflection has been defined as “systematic enquiry into one’s own practice to improve that practice and to deepen one’s understanding of it” (Lucas, 1991, p. 85).

Reflective thinking is initiated by the perception of a problem (Dewey, 1933). It is this acknowledgement of uncertainty and “unsettledness” that initiates the inquiry process. In other words, in order to be reflective participants, teachers need to be able to discuss their doubts and inquiry questions without being seen as unknowing or incompetent. Being able to make one’s practice “problematic” has been observed as a first step in this process (Valli, 1997). When teachers have no doubts about their practice or the programs they are using, reflection remains of minimal importance.

In working toward becoming knowledgeable, reflective participants in the assessment process, teachers have assumed the role of teacher-researcher to better understand the experiences...
and interactions in their classrooms (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1992). In doing so, teachers have become producers of research and knowledge as well as consumers (Richardson, 1994). By videotaping classroom events (Berg & Smith, 1996), observing peers at work in classrooms, and working in team teaching situations, teachers are opening up new avenues for dialogue and collaboration. This has allowed teachers the opportunity to become more reflective about their practice. Teachers also use journal writing as a way to help understand the perspectives and beliefs they bring to their practice and their effect on classroom events (Hubbard & Power, 1993).

Many teachers have used journal writing to create belief statements or platform statements about their philosophy of education in order to understand the expectations and hidden beliefs they bring to the assessment process (Kottkamp, 1990). In writing these statements, teachers have been able to “unpack” their values and biases and to distance themselves from their practice in order to critique it more effectively. The purpose of these procedures is to help teachers see their practice from a different, more critical perspective (Osterman, 1990).

Another way to help teachers make this shift is to support the development of teacher dialogue groups. When teachers come together to discuss educational issues that are relevant to their practice, change and growth become possible (Ohanian, 1994). Teacher-research groups (Queenan, 1988) and assessment-driven teacher dialogue groups (Stephens et al., 1996) help provide a structure for teachers to support one another through the change process. Through these dialogue groups, teacher-research groups, and journal writing, teachers are inquiring into the quality of the learning experiences provided for their students and the effectiveness of the decisions they make in their classroom.

**Meaningful student involvement**

The assessment as measurement paradigm has historically left students out of the assessment process (Bushweller, 1997). Assessment has been something we do “to” students rather than “with” students. Schools administer standardized tests and send them off to be scored by external testing agencies; eventually the results of the tests are reported back. Through this traditional assessment as measurement paradigm, students and schools have come to rely on external testing agencies to judge their effectiveness and to document their educational progress. This lack of involvement has created passive recipients, not active participants, in the learning as well as the assessment process (Calfee & Perfumo, 1993).

In the assessment as inquiry paradigm, portfolios of student work, student-led conferences, learning response logs, and negotiated reporting procedures include the student in the assessment process (Tierney, Carter, & Desai, 1991). This new level of involvement helps students to accept more responsibility for their learning and to reflect on their own educational progress. Students need to be invited to participate in determining the criteria by which their work will be judged and then play a role in actually judging their work (Kohn, 1993).

Portfolios are used as a vehicle to promote reflection on students’ academic progress as well as document their growth in various subject areas (Graves, 1992). Students collect work generated during the school year to evaluate their progress and set goals for their future learning experiences. Many times these portfolios are used in conjunction with student-led conferences where students share their portfolios and reflections with parents and other interested audiences. These portfolios have an authentic purpose and are a primary vehicle for supporting student reflection as well as student involvement in the assessment process.

Another way students are involved in the assessment process is through negotiated reporting configurations (Anthony, Johnson, Mickelson, & Preece, 1991). Students are invited to become intimately involved in the creation of their report cards in a negotiated process with both teachers and parents. This process may begin by allowing students to evaluate their efforts and performances, based on criteria negotiated between the teacher’s perspective, the information contained in various standards documents, and the values of the community. Opening up the criteria used to evaluate student work and inviting students to participate in the evaluation process helps students begin to feel a part of the assessment process, rather than as passive recipients of someone else’s evaluation.

Another way of involving students in assessing their progress is through classroom-designed
rubrics (Rickards & Cheek, 1999). Rubrics are negotiated forms of criteria explicitly written for particular classroom work and activities. Again, opening up the conversation to include students in the decisions about what criteria are used to evaluate their progress helps students become involved in the assessment process. When students become an active part of the assessment process, assessment becomes a process of inquiry rather than an external measurement reducing student performance and ability to a numerical score for comparative purposes.

**Negotiating the criteria used to assess student performance**

The debate over what children should be taught and what they need to know in order to be successful adults has been going on in the United States for centuries (Bracey, 1995). This debate has been rekindled by many of the standards-based restructuring initiatives across the U.S. and other countries (Noddings, 1997). The creation of standards documents by state legislatures and federal education agencies, along with the standardized testing that usually accompanies these documents, has tended to restrict programs to the assessment as measurement paradigm, while at the same time supporting agendas tied to gatekeeping and exclusion (Tierney, 1998). These documents are written as general learning statements by people far removed from actual classrooms and students. The negotiation of educational criteria becomes a highly political issue and hence a highly controversial one (Shannon, 1996).

As educators, we just don’t know all that students need to know, nor are we able to teach them everything we do know (Wiggins, 1989). The criteria used for assessing student performance should be open for negotiation and revision to adapt to our changing societal demands. Teachers and students should have a voice in what is taught, how this knowledge is eventually assessed, and what criteria are used for evaluation.

With all of these restructuring efforts, teachers have been bombarded with standards created by federal and state agencies, local school boards, and professional organizations like the National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association. Using these documents as guidelines, teachers may open the negotiations by writing detailed belief or platform statements concerning their expectations for student learning and behavior (Kottkamp, 1990). These platform statements provide a place to open up a discussion among parents, teachers and school officials about the experiences to be provided for students during the school year. By presenting their criteria to be negotiated, teachers open up a space for different voices to be heard concerning what is of value in education and what place particular content areas and learning processes are to have in the school curriculum.

As mentioned before, classroom rubrics designed with student and teacher input are an excellent vehicle for negotiation and involvement in the assessment process. Students and teachers come together to “unpack” their values and beliefs about education in order to expose these to discussion and negotiation. It is this process of negotiation that is of primary importance, not necessarily the actual documents that are created in the process (Boomer, 1991).

The items included on school district report cards and how amenable these cards are to change should also be open to negotiation. School report cards are a written statement about what the community deems valuable in education. If it is on the report card and it gets a grade, it is probably seen as important by that community. Even the amount of space designated for each subject area is a statement concerning how much value is placed upon that topic. The larger the space, it seems the more value is assigned to that particular subject or topic.

In negotiating the criteria used to assess student performance, educators should consider the “models of excellence” already available in the outside world that classroom teachers and students can use to judge the quality of the work done in schools. Possibly educators can look to various awards, such as the Newbery or Pulitzer prize for writing or the Nobel prize for science, in order to find criteria that are authentic and can be incorporated into the negotiation of student evaluation. What are the authentic models of criteria available for assessing student performance? Instead of school districts and education departments being the sole creators of these criteria of student progress, opening up the discussion to bring in multiple voices may create more authentic, more useful criteria.
No quick fix

When educators begin to acknowledge the complexity and the interpretive nature of the learning and assessment process, traditional assessment as measurement procedures become problematic. All assessments are interpretive; unfortunately teachers and students rarely become involved in large-scale testing programs' interpretations or dissemination of results. The assessment as inquiry paradigm offers teachers another perspective from which to understand the needs and abilities of their students, using different assessment methods for different purposes and audiences.

Making this shift from assessment as measurement to assessment as inquiry takes time, administrative support, collaboration, and the opportunity to engage in dialogue. Simply mandating new procedures for teachers to administer will not help teachers make this shift in assessment paradigms.

It is my hope that classroom teachers will begin to take an active role in the assessments used in their classroom. Teachers need to involve students in the assessment process in meaningful ways, become knowledgeable, reflective participants in the assessment process themselves, and negotiate the criteria used to evaluate academic performances. As educators, we need to acknowledge the complexity of the learning process and stop trying to find the quick-fix solutions to both educational and assessment issues. When assessment becomes a process of inquiry, an interpretive activity rather than simply the "objective" measure of predetermined behaviors, teachers will be able to use assessment to make informed decisions concerning curriculum and instruction in their classrooms.

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References


