Teaching for learning, learning to assess: One school's journey

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Result of 4 years of reading surveys

- Top 3 favorite genres: Adventure, Fantasy, and Fiction
- Least favorite genres: Western, Memoir, and Science
- (Thrillers and Horror come in 4th and 5th place!)
Here’s what we did

Year 1 (2008-2009)

Grade 8

Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) tests are holistic measures of how well students understand the meaning of text.

M/C (non-fiction paragraphs)
Hand Scored
PC Computer Generated Results
DRP: Here’s what we learned

When students are engaged in the practice of reading all year long, we should expect to see a rise in scores (Pre- and Post Tests).

That is, scores shouldn’t go backwards.

We learned that it’s possible to help students understand what kind of test the DRP was and what to expect from a test of this type.
Year 1: Overview

We’re starting to look at concepts of quality and how to define them.
Year 2 (2009-2010)

School wide initiative for English teachers (grades 6-8).

Action Learning System (ALS).

Teachers met together as one group several times a year.

3 assessments were created for each grade level.
ALS: Here’s what we did

Test was put into DataDirector.

Results were seen immediately.

Color-coded reports were generated.

For the first time, teachers across the grade level got together to discuss results.
What happened?

Difficulty was in sharing data.

I see you!
Year 3 (2010-2011)

Grades 6-8.

ALS, continued.

All 3 grade levels administered assessments and teachers spent time working together to analyze results.
Chairs of each grade level department work with teachers to create grade level learning goals based on the data.

Learning goals presented to Principal at the beginning of the year Cabinet Meeting.

Assessment practices are well under way.

Accountability on Paper!
Teachers and Students

Teachers are routinely sharing instructional practices to identify common misconceptions about learning.

Students are identifying and naming key strategies that either promote or impede the reading process.

It’s more than, “I don’t know.”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Question</th>
<th>Point</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
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Trying to focus, but mind was still training to focus. Thought I was reading the graph right. I guess I forgot to put in some year.

Overall, the test showed that I really did not do well. But I guess I should build or find another study habit because this one is not working.
District-wide initiative.

Grades 7+ teams of administrators and teachers (English, History, Math) met several times during the year to create two common assessments to be administered during the year.

Substitutes were brought in & teachers were paid.

Assessments were created and administered to thousands of students.
What happened?

Concerns were expressed during the process.

Were the results from these common assessments going to be factored into teacher evaluation?

Some teams did not spend any time together to discuss the results of either assessment.

Some teams dropped out.
The teachers I work with continue the practice of administering common assessments, analyzing data, and discussing strategies for improvement.

I want you to see me!

(But what about the district-wide common assessments that we worked on last year?)
In History this year

Like last year, we started the year with our first benchmark exam testing 6th and 7th grade History content standards.

We provided students with online resources.

We embraced the idea of a Flipped Classroom.

We provided study guides.

The only thing we did not do was to re-teach.
Our Hypothesis

When students take learning into their hands, access prior knowledge, embrace the world of technology - including that of the flipped classroom - they will perform well.
The results

2011-12 Results for 302 students
29 questions. M/C
Median Score: 19; Mean Score 19
4% (12) - A
21% (63) - B
15% (45) - C
23% (70) - D
37% (112) - Failed
And this year’s results?

2012-13 results for 343 students

31 questions. M/C
Median Score: 22; Mean Score: 21
7% (23) - A
20% (69) - B
24% (84) - C
23% (80) - D
25% (87) - Failed
What we are working on at the moment?

November 2012

Benchmark #2 The U. S. Constitution

95 questions covering two standards

Exam consists of M/C; T/F; and short answer test questions
We look at data from STAR.

We look at year-to-year comparisons: How did this year's students perform compared to last year's students?

We use the data to tell a story about the beginning and end of a student’s life in middle school (we’re building student profiles).

We look at reports aggregated by gender, ethnicity, SpEd, & socio-economics to see how our students are doing. And we notice irregularities among certain populations.

We also look at qualitative data: What beliefs and attitudes do students bring with them about their lives in middle school?

We administer pre- and post-surveys trying to get an idea of study habits.
Is it making a difference?

- Ongoing Benchmark Assessment Practices, with a focus on correcting thinking errors, change the way students view the acquisition of knowledge.

- When teachers engage in common assessment practices, share data, and commit to student learning, then the nature of how we teach and learn changes.
What did we really learn?

A teacher’s willingness and ability to look at data is impacted by site and district leadership. *If it matters to site leaders, then it will matter to most teachers.*

When students are given opportunity in class to ask questions about their work, they learn to revise their thinking. *“How could I have missed that?”*

Systematic assessment feedback and reflection can provide the motivation needed to learn and improve.
When you take me up to the summit of a very steep mountain, I expect to see the vista views. I expect to be taken on a journey of understanding.

When we engage in something as monumental as this - building capacity for understanding through the implementation of common assessments - then we had better take the time to see what the data says, what it means, and how we can use it to improve practices.

Otherwise, don’t do it all.
Next steps: Program evaluation

If we want to collect information about student learning, then we need to use it. And that doesn’t mean just placing students in special programs.

We need a way to evaluate the effectiveness of all programs in place.

What we’re seeing is a recycling of old ideas with new names. How do we know whether these programs are making a difference?
There’s Hope

Some people believe that the synergistic thinking emerging from professional collaboration will produce quality assessments that measure what teachers need to know about learning. And, together with a sound framework, we will produce great assessments that positively impact student learning.

Practically speaking, what we really need is a longitudinal data system that helps build the stories of growth and change in student learning over time.

We want clear views of the processes of learning, accurate information about the present state of our students, and instructional action plans that will close the gaps of learning.

And we want to know that the interpretation of the assessment evidence is accurate and relevant.

This is a good start, I think.
**In gratitude**

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