reforms dispassionately can be particularly hard when teachers feel
denigrated, devalued, and under scrutiny. It seems that every intended
outcome of a policy comes with its shadow of unintended outcomes,
and the eclipse caused by the shadow is sometimes more dramatic
than the original image. This being the case, teachers and administra­
tors have it in their power to act rather than react and to move the edu­
cational change agenda forward in ways that they believe can really
benefit students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ideas for Follow-Up</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. What was the purpose of classroom assessment when you
were a student? |
| 2. How is large-scale assessment being used for educational
change in your district? |
| 3. How is classroom assessment being used for educational
change in your district? |

In Chapter 1, I described a "preferred future" for assessment. My
vision is one that makes assessment an integral part of learning—
guiding the process and stimulating further learning. The word assess­
ment is derived from the Latin assidere, meaning "to sit beside or with" (Wiggins, 1993). Although this notion of a teacher sitting with her
students to really understand what is happening as they pursue the
challenges of learning is far removed from the role that assessment and
evaluation have typically played in schools, many teachers have always
done it. In this chapter, I look more closely at the various purposes for
assessment that occurs routinely in classrooms. Classroom assessment
is a complex undertaking that means something different to different
audiences and in different situations. And so it should. Assessment has
many purposes that sometimes support one another and sometimes
compete or conflict with one another. As Wilson (1996) noted, teachers
engage in a broad range of assessment roles, and keeping them
straight is a challenging task (see Table 3.1).

Clearly, these roles overlap, and watching teachers try to manage
the assessment activities and juggle them to satisfy the various goals
shows how complex the process of classroom assessment really is.
Also, tensions are embedded in these various roles and goals that
cause concern for teachers. I hope that these tensions become more
visible and understandable after I describe three different approaches
to classroom assessment that have guided my thinking as I have con­
templated the role of classroom assessment in my preferred future.
The three approaches are Assessment of Learning, Assessment for
Learning, and Assessment as Learning. Although I intend to highlight
the contribution of Assessment for Learning and Assessment as
Learning as part of a preferred future, Assessment of Learning is also

Used with permission. Excerpt from
Assessment Roles and Goals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Goal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher as mentor</td>
<td>Provide feedback and support to each student.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher as guide</td>
<td>Gather diagnostic information to lead the group through the work at hand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher as accountant</td>
<td>Maintain records of student progress and achievement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher as reporter</td>
<td>Report to parents, students, and the school administration about student progress and achievement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher as program director</td>
<td>Make adjustments and revisions to instructional practices.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: Adapted from *Assessment Roles and Goals* (Wilson, 1996).

Assessment of Learning

The predominant kind of assessment in schools is *Assessment of Learning*. Its purpose is summative, intended to certify learning and report to parents and students about students’ progress in school, usually by signaling students’ relative position compared to other students. *Assessment of Learning* in classrooms is typically done at the end of something (e.g., a unit, a course, a grade, a Key Stage, a program) and takes the form of tests or exams that include questions drawn from the material studied during that time. In *Assessment of Learning*, the results are expressed symbolically, generally as marks or letter grades, and summarized as averages of a number of marks across several content areas to report to parents.

This is the kind of assessment that still dominates most classroom assessment activities, especially in secondary schools, with teachers firmly in charge of both creating and marking the tests. Teachers use the tests to assess the quantity and accuracy of student work, and the bulk of teacher effort in assessment is taken up in marking and grading. A strong emphasis is placed on comparing students, and feedback to students comes in the form of marks or grades, with little direction or advice for improvement. These kinds of testing events indicate which students are doing well and which ones are doing poorly. Typically, they don’t give much indication of mastery of particular ideas or concepts because the test content is generally too limited and the scoring is too simplistic to represent the broad range of skills and knowledge that has been covered. But this lack of specificity hasn’t presented a problem because the teachers’ perceived purpose of the assessment is to produce a rank order of the students and assign a symbol to designate the students’ position within the group, whatever group it might be. Teachers maintain voluminous records of student achievement that are used only for justifying the grades that are assigned.

Although much of this book focuses on the next two approaches to assessment, there are and will always be milestones and junctures where “summative” assessment is called for and *Assessment of Learning* is essential. Doing it right is a challenge in itself.

*Assessment of Learning* and grading have a long history in education. They have been widely accepted by parents and the public. If they have served us so well, why would we worry about a process that works? Without moving too far away from my primary purpose, I’d like to highlight a few of the issues that are currently contentious about what we have always done. Although the public has been largely supportive of grading in schools, skepticism is increasing about its fairness and even its accuracy. Educational researchers and theorists have been critical of traditional grading practices for quite some time (Marzano, 2000). In terms of measurement theory, grades are highly suspect. Why? Because teachers consider many factors other than academic achievement when they assign grades; teachers weight assessments differently, and they misinterpret single scores on assessments to represent performance on a wide range of skills and abilities (Marzano, 2000). As education becomes an essential ingredient for a successful future, more attention will be paid to how grades are calculated and how well they actually reflect what they are taken to mean.

The book is not yet closed on *Assessment of Learning*, and educators have a great deal to learn to ensure that it and the grades that result from it are defensible and worthwhile.

Assessment for Learning offers an alternative perspective to traditional assessment in schools. Simply put, *Assessment for Learning* shifts the emphasis from summative to formative assessment, from making
Assessment as Learning

Assessment for Learning can go a long way in enhancing student learning. By introducing the notion of Assessment as Learning,

judgments to creating descriptions that can be used in the service of the next stage of learning.

When they are doing Assessment for Learning, teachers collect a wide range of data so that they can modify the learning work for their students. They craft assessment tasks that open a window on what students know and can do already and use the insights that come from the process to design the next steps in instruction. To do this, teachers use observation, worksheets, questioning in class, student-teacher conferences, or whatever mechanism is likely to give them information that will be useful for their planning and teaching. Marking is not designed to make comparative judgments among the students but to highlight each student's strengths and weaknesses and provide them with feedback that will further their learning.

Assumption: Classroom assessment can enhance learning.

When the cook tastes the soup, that's formative; when the guests taste the soup, that's summative.

—Robert Stake

the curriculum targets to identify particular learning needs. Assessment for Learning happens in the middle of learning, often more than once, rather than at the end. It is interactive, with teachers providing assistance as part of the assessment. It helps teachers provide the feedback to scaffold next steps. And it depends on teachers' diagnostic skills to make it work.

Recordkeeping in this approach may include a grade book, but the records on which teachers rely are things like checklists of student progress against expectations, artifacts, portfolios of student work over time, and worksheets to trace the progression of students along the learning continuum.

In reality, it is through classroom assessment that attitudes, skills, knowledge and thinking are fostered, nurtured and accelerated—or stifled.

—Hynes (1991)

Assessment of Learning, for Learning, and as Learning

I intend to reinforce and extend the role of formative assessment for learning by emphasizing the role of the student, not only as a contributor to the assessment and learning process, but also as the critical connector between them. The student is the link. Students, as active, engaged, and critical assessors, can make sense of information, relate it to prior knowledge, and master the skills involved. This is the regulatory process in metacognition. It occurs when students personally monitor what they are learning and use the feedback from this monitoring to make adjustments, adaptations, and even major changes in what they understand. Assessment as Learning is the ultimate goal, where students are their own best assessors.

At some point, students will need to be self-motivating and able to bring their talents and knowledge to bear on the decisions and problems that make up their lives. They can't just wait for the teacher (or politicians, or salespeople, or religious leaders) to tell them whether or not the answer is "right." Effective assessment empowers students to ask reflective questions and consider a range of strategies for learning and acting. Over time, students move forward in their learning when they can use personal knowledge to construct meaning, have skills of self-monitoring to realize that they don't understand something, and have ways of deciding what to do next.

Recordkeeping in Assessment as Learning is a personal affair. Students and teachers decide (often together) about the important evidence of learning and how it should be organized and kept. Students routinely reflect on their work and make judgments about how they can capitalize on what they have done already. Comparison with others is almost irrelevant. Instead, the critical reference points are the students' own prior work and the aspirations and targets for continued learning.

Getting the Balance Right

These three approaches all contribute to student learning but in vastly different ways. Table 3.2 gives a summary of the salient features of each approach.

As I mentioned earlier, all three assessment approaches have their place. The trick is to get the balance right. At the current juncture, almost all classroom assessment in a traditional environment is summative Assessment of Learning, focused on measuring learning after the fact and used for categorizing students and reporting these judgments to others. A few teachers use Assessment for Learning by building in diagnostic processes—formative assessment and feedback.
at stages in the program—and giving students second chances to improve their marks (and, it is hoped, their learning). Systematic Assessment as Learning is almost nonexistent.

Obviously, there are times when information about students' achievement of key outcomes and the degree to which they compare with others is important and the approach should be Assessment of Learning. The issue is whether schools should be utilizing Assessment of Learning over and over again to such an extent that it leaves no place for other approaches to assessment. Figure 3.1 shows this traditional relationship of the approaches to one another.

Figure 3.2 shows a reconfiguration of the pyramid to suggest a different kind of balance—one that emphasizes increased attention to Assessment for and as Learning. In this scenario, Assessment of Learning has a role to play when decisions must be made that require summative judgments, or when teachers and students want to see the cumulative effect of their work, but this role is relatively small. The major focus is on classroom assessment that contributes to student learning, by the teacher (for learning) and by the student (as learning).

Given the history of schools as sorting institutions, the notion that assessment and learning are intimately and inextricably intertwined is revolutionary. On the surface of it, the ideas are appealing, but the fit with schools as we know them is uncomfortable and awkward. I suspect this is the dilemma that teachers have talked about when they say, "Assessment is the hardest part." They have always been caught between monitoring learning and categorizing students on the basis of their assessments, and teaching students, and they have struggled with these contradictory responsibilities. One teacher whom I interviewed recently expressed it this way:

I really struggle with assessment. I'm supposed to be teaching for mastery of learning skills. What does that have to do with common testing?

This tension, which has always existed, is exactly the reason for reconfiguring the balance. Teachers and administrators can implement this reconfiguration without creating a major upheaval in what the community, especially parents, expect of schools. Parents always have their own children's interests at heart. When they can see how Assessment for and as Learning can contribute to enhanced learning and success for their child, it may draw them into the fray as willing allies in the focus on learning.

In this reconfigured assessment environment, assessment would make up a large part of the school day, not in the form of separate tests,
but as a seamless part of the learning process. And there would be tests when the decisions to be made require identification of a few individuals or groups, or when a summative description is important for students and others as a milestone or rite of passage. In the real world, these incidents are far fewer than the experience of schools would lead us to believe.

Idea for Follow-Up

1. Interview teachers in your school to identify the balance of purposes for assessment. What does the assessment pyramid look like?
2. Analyze samples of assessment tasks being used in your school. Are they designed to be Assessment of for or as Learning?

CHAPTER 4

A Focus on Learning

The underlying idea behind this book is that learning is the imperative. Learning has always provided the advantage for human survival through difficult, even seemingly impossible times. Human beings are able to learn, unlearn, share their learning, and pass on learning to those who follow. Learning is at the core of our being, as individuals and collectively. It is the key to equipping future generations to respond and to survive in a frenetically and unpredictably changing world. And perhaps most important, we have not even approached the limits of what can be learned.

The challenge for educators is to apply our emerging understanding about learning to help students become the citizens for a "preferred future" where all students, not just a few, will learn. They will learn not only the foundation skills of language and mathematics, but also a whole range of "new basics," such as accessing, interpreting, and applying information; performing critical thinking and analysis; solving novel problems; making informed judgments; working independently and in groups; and discerning the appropriate course of action in ambiguous situations.

Learning is intellectual. Learning is social. Learning is emotional. It is ordered, and it is erratic. It happens by design and by chance. We all do it, and we take it for granted, even though we do not have a clear understanding of what it means or how to make the most of it.

There are a multiplicity of conceptions of the nature of learning, from something that happens to the learner, with knowledge as the "stuff" to fill students' waiting minds, to a view suggesting that learning is a completely unique experience of constructing reality for each