Activity 2.1
Exploring the Relationship Between Learning Goals and Assessment

Learning Target for the Activity

- Explain how clear academic achievement standards are the basis for developing sound assessments.

Purpose

In this activity school leaders analyze the relationship of one assessment to the learning goals it is intended to assess. The purpose of doing this analysis is to prepare school leaders to think in this way about the other assessments in use in the building/district as well and to demonstrate the importance of understanding the link between learning goals and assessment.

Time

Approximately one hour

Materials Needed

- Choose an assessment in use in your building/district. For this exercise use a formal assessment: a test or performance assessment. Include the scoring directions (e.g., a test scoring key, rubrics). Select an assessment with enough substance that it can be used with the protocol below. The assessment can be projected electronically or provided as a print copy to each participant.

- A copy (electronic or printed) of the state standard(s), teacher instructional objectives, and any other learning goals for which the chosen assessment is intended.

- A copy (electronic or printed) of the protocol "What's in an Assessment?"

- Chart paper and markers

Suggested Room Setup

Arrange tables and chairs to accommodate a small group.

Directions

Complete each step in the order below:

1. Participants receive their materials: the assessment and its scoring guide, the learning goal(s) the assessment is intended to measure, and the protocol handout "What's in an Assessment?"

2. The group designate a facilitator. The facilitator and participants follow the protocol.

Closure

Closure is built into step 8 of the protocol.

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What's in an Assessment?

This protocol can be used to analyze assessment exercises or instructional tasks for what they require students to know and be able to do, and for their match with intended learning goals.

Step 1. Selecting a Facilitator

Select a participant to serve as the facilitator. The facilitator will ensure that the steps are followed in order and that all participants have an opportunity to speak. If the group wishes, they can designate a scribe to take notes.

Step 2. Presenting the Assessment

The group describes the assessment. What are its features and formats?

- What assessment method is used (selected response, constructed response, performance assessment, or personal communication)? Does the assessment use more than one method?

- What type of items, exercises, tasks, or prompts does it present to students?

- Are there directions, and what do they say?

- What scoring methods and directions are provided with the assessment?

- Does the assessment explicitly reference a learning goal? If so, what is it? If not, is one implied in the title of the assessment?

- What other descriptive information about the surface features of the assessment seem salient? For example, is there anything about the length or look of the assessment that would strike students?

- How are students intended to respond to the assessment (e.g., by writing answers on the page, doing a class presentation, writing an essay on a word processor)?

Step 3. Trying the Assessment

- Participants should attempt to do the assessment themselves if it is possible within the time and space available. If not, they should "do" the assignment as a thought experiment: what steps would students take as they work their way through the assessment?

Step 4. Analyzing the Assessment Content

- What content knowledge (facts, concepts, and/or procedures) would students need to have for this assessment? Make sure you have teased out all the content knowledge that seems to be required, whether or not it is relevant to the assessment topic. Record your results on chart paper.

- What cognitive levels would students activate for this assessment? Participants can use Bloom's taxonomy, Webb's depth of knowledge, or a simple dichotomy (recall or basic comprehension vs. higher-order thinking), depending on how student thinking is usually discussed in your building/district. Record your results on chart paper.

- For any descriptive scoring key (e.g., rubrics or point schemes), note the content knowledge and cognitive level as well. Record your results on chart paper.

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Step 5. Analyzing the Intended Learning Goals

- In this step you will analyze the content knowledge and cognitive levels stated or implied in the learning goal(s) the assessment is intended to assess. Please remember that since the assessment is a sample of everything that could be asked, the results from step 5 may not match those of step 4 exactly. Please bracket and save any observations about the relationship between the assessment content and the learning goals for step 6; for now, just analyze the intended learning goals.

- What type of learning goals are involved (knowledge, reasoning, skill, and/or product)?

- What content knowledge (facts, concepts, and/or procedures) do these learning goals say students need to know? Record your results on chart paper.

- What cognitive levels do these learning goals say students need to activate? Record your results on chart paper.

Step 6. Comparing Intended Learning Goals and Assessment

- Using the results you have recorded on chart paper, identify areas where the assessment exercises students are asked to do, and the credit they will get from the scoring scheme for doing them, match the intended learning goals. Compare the content and cognitive-level descriptions for the assessment with those for the learning goals. Use green markers to identify exact (or very close) matches and yellow markers for inexact matches, highlighting the parallel and nonparallel language on the assessment and learning goal charts.

- Using the same chart paper results, identify areas where the assessment exercises students are asked to do, and the credit they will get from the scoring scheme for doing them, require something from students that is not in the intended learning goals. Use red markers for this.

- Finally, using the same process, identify areas where the intended learning goals require something from students that is not in the assessment. Use purple markers for this.

Step 7. Interpreting the Relationship Between the Learning Goal(s) and the Assessment

- Evaluate the "target-method match" (see Figure 2.3). Is the assessment method a match to the learning goal?

- Evaluate the representativeness of the assessment exercises or tasks as a sample from the domain described by the learning goal(s). Are the content and cognitive levels in the assessment a reasonable representation of the domain? Remember that the assessment does not have to ask students everything possible, just be a representative sample of the intended learning.

- Evaluate whether the assessment requires irrelevant knowledge and skills that could cause the assessment to misrepresent students' status on the learning goals.

Step 8. Debriefing

Participants, led by the facilitator, discuss how well the protocol process worked and what they have learned by following it.