

# Dilemmas in Classroom Assessment

AND WHAT TO DO  
ABOUT THEM



PORTAGE & MAIN PRESS

EDITED BY ROBERT J. WILSON

Portage & Main Press

# Contents

<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>I. Classroom Practices .....</b>	<b>5</b>
1. David Notman Moving from Marking to Assessing .....	7
2. Timothy Mosser Learning about Assessment with Primary Children .....	17
3. Lyn Shulha and Christopher Deluca Accommodating and Assessing Students with Exceptionalities .....	27
4. Robert Petrick Using the ICE Model with Learners of Differing Abilities ...	39
5. Cinde Lock Assessing Both Quality and Quantity of Learning .....	45
6. Robert J. Wilson Helping Parents Further their Children’s Learning .....	53
7. Sue Fostaty Young Objectivity and Subjectivity in Classroom Assessment .....	57
8. John O. Anderson Five Criteria for Well-Crafted Assessments.....	65
9. Mark Lee Choosing among Various Models of Learning and Assessment.....	71
10. Robert J. Wilson Assessing for Learning and Assessment of Learning .....	79
<b>II. School Practices .....</b>	<b>85</b>
11. Sue Fostaty Young Making Different Tests Equivalent .....	87
12. Mark Lee Matching Beliefs and Practices in Assessment .....	95

13. Helen Snider  
    Creating Time and Space for Teachers to Improve  
    their Practice ..... 103

14. Lyn Shulha  
    Professional Learning for Individuals through  
    School-Based Collaboration ..... 109

15. Helen Snider  
    Creating a Climate for Change in Assessment Practices..... 117

**III. External Assessments ..... 125**

16. Robert Petrick  
    Balancing Criterion- and Self-Referenced Assessments..... 127

17. Cinde Lock  
    Preparing Students for External Assessments ..... 133

18. Don Klinger  
    How Successful Districts Utilize External Results ..... 139

**Contributors ..... 149**

**Works Cited ..... 151**

**Further Reading ..... 153**

# Introduction

**ROBERT J. WILSON**

**A**ssessment concerns everyone in education. Students learn early to take it seriously, more so as they pass through the system. Parents want to know how their children are doing, not only what they are learning but also how that learning compares to that of other children. Districts and provinces mandate assessments at all levels of the school system for purposes of accountability and program improvement. Even the country has assessment programs. Teachers and principals often feel great pressure to accommodate these levels of assessment requirements and, further, to try to sort out what makes the most educational sense to them. Our overall goal in this volume is to share what we have found that might help with some of the dilemmas this expansion of assessment creates.

First of all, some background. All the essays included here assume the same point of reference toward learning: the assessment information that benefits teachers most is information about growth in student learning. And good teachers show a willingness to transfer a great deal of the assessment process to students, no matter how young they may be. We believe that reliance on self-assessment and growth points the way to the resolution of many of the dilemmas that teachers face.

In a previous volume, Sue Fostaty Young and Robert Wilson (*Assessment and Learning: The ICE Approach*) produced a portable model of assessing growth and showed how teachers and students of all ages used it to facilitate student learning: the ICE model. The ICE model is not tied to any particular form of assessment (such as rubrics, assignments, or tests) but works with all of them. Nor does it depend on the teacher to be the monitor of learning unless needed or desired. Rather, it is most useful when it is taught to learners, even very young learners, so that they can identify where they are in their learning and will be able then to plot their own next steps.

Simply put, the ICE model holds that learning a new concept, a new attitude, or a new skill begins with discrete bits of knowledge. When you are presented with your first digital camera, for example, you begin by trying to discover what each icon means, what all the buttons do, and how the viewfinder works. You may follow the manual point by point to learn how

to replace the batteries and how to use the on-screen menu, clicking through one line at a time. These basic learnings are called Ideas in the ICE model and are seen as essential building blocks to all learning.

The required steps become automatic as you play with the camera, and slowly you will discover shortcuts to the step-by-step approach. Combining a timed shot with a dark background becomes possible, and so will overlaying one image on another, for example. This linking of discrete pieces of knowledge occurs almost naturally as we learn, unless we are content with the more routine ways of doing things. In the ICE model, these linkages are called Connections. A variation of this form of connection occurs when you attach old learning (what you remember from your old camera that might still apply) with the new.

Finally, it may happen that your interest in the camera and what it can do moves into a desire to produce your own prints and using them to make cards and invitations. This inclination to take old learning and turn it in a new direction is characteristic of those who are motivated to take their learning deeper. We often see these novel elaborations happen in a hobby, a sport, or in the arts, but they can be encouraged in the school setting as well. In the ICE model, these elaborations are called Extensions.

One central dilemma in current classroom assessment is inherent in balancing both the kinds of assessments that help teachers and learners progress in the classroom and those that are required for evaluation purposes from outside the classroom. These external assessments are inevitably norm- or criterion-referenced (they compare student achievement to others, to the norm, or to some set of standards or outcomes, the criterion, or do both). The results from these external assessments can be useful to teachers (as several essays in this book make clear), but, if these types of data are the only ones that teachers have or create, then assessment will be less than helpful.

One aid has been particularly helpful to teachers and administrators who are wrestling with multiple and seemingly conflicting demands: collaboration. Many of the essays in this book illustrate how educators, when they work together, are able to capitalize on their discrete understandings in ways that further their collective enterprise. When schools are more than collections of individuals, and when they capitalize on the relationships that blossom there, they succeed in using assessment information in positive ways.

## **HOW THE CHAPTERS ARE ORGANIZED**

To make the information in this volume accessible, each contributor has followed the same format. Each briefly describes a scenario that illustrates a current issue. A summary of key points in the essay follows, and the bulk of the chapter contains jargon-free information and advice on how the dilemma

can be solved, with lots of examples. Where technical terms are used, a definition follows within the body of the text.

## **HOW THE BOOK IS ORGANIZED**

If your interests are primarily in classroom practices, look to the first essays in Section I for a source of practical ideas. If you are interested in school-level practice, look at Section II for ideas about creating an environment where individuals, working together, can provide a powerful context for improved practices. Finally, if you are dealing with externally produced assessments (a newer challenge for practising educators), look at Section III for ideas to help use external assessments purposefully while minimizing negative effects.

Within each section, the chapters are organized from specific to general, and from practical to theoretical. In Section I, “Classroom Practices,” for example, David Notman gives a clear step-by-step method of involving students and their parents in the assessment process. Later on, John O. Anderson describes the criteria generally needed to ensure good assessment no matter how it is conducted.

The authors of the essays are a varied lot. Some are classroom teachers, and all have taught extensively at some level in the educational system. Some have been administrators. Others have spent considerable time studying assessment issues formally in graduate programs. Almost all have worked intimately with the others over a sustained number of years to hone the insights you will find in their essays. Some suggested readings are provided at the end of the volume.

We want to have the uses of assessment for positive educational purposes dominate the discussion. This outcome can occur only if we all understand what assessment is (and is not) and work to have its strengths rule. We hope this volume provides just such a background for you and your colleagues.