MONITORING LITERACY TEACHING

Fact sheet 4/2020

Peter Underwood Centre

4

Evaluating teaching practice through ongoing monitoring and regular student assessment is integral to good literacy teaching[19]. Establishing the effectiveness of any teaching practice is challenging because there are multiple influencing factors that make it hard to determine cause and effect[5]. The Tasmanian Department of Education Literacy Framework 2019-2022 has set as one of three system priorities to establish "valid and reliable measures of impact and learner growth". This involves three actions[8].

- Develop clear expectations and guidelines to build system-wide understanding of the measurement of learner growth in literacy.
- Implement the tools and supports for effective measurement of learner growth in literacy.
- Implement the tools and supports to measure the impact of system-wide literacy actions on our learners.[8]

The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) standards[2,3] and the Tasmanian Good Teaching Guide on Data Literacy[7] highlight the importance of using data to inform each teacher's own practice as well as whole school improvement approaches.

➔ Monitoring needs to be intentional: the over-arching purpose of all literacy assessment is to inform teaching practice in order to enhance students' literacy development and achievement[7,10].

➔ Different types of assessment generate different types of data for different purposes. All types of assessment must work together to support teaching and learning[1,7].

> "I support teachers to engage in data analysis. So I'm making sure that they really understand the data that they're getting from students, and know what to do with it".

This fact sheet is based on our research in Tasmania[17], supported by other research. It outlines formative and summative literacy assessment practices that offer insights into learner progress and inform the planning of instructional action. Some assessment tasks may serve both formative and summative purposes.

Our research findings indicate that schools in Tasmania:

➔ are engaged in a substantial, ongoing schedule of literacy assessment,
➔ collect multiple types and levels of data to "paint a really clear picture of student achievement",
➔ value teachers' "own balanced judgements" as a key basis for monitoring literacy teaching and learning,
➔ use data walls as visualisation tools, enabling staff to see trends across a whole cohort of students,
➔ recognise the purposes, benefits, and drawbacks of different types of monitoring and assessment.

> "Having a data wall has made a massive difference … you need to see the results to know what you're doing is working [and] it's a way of ensuring that nobody falls under the radar".

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

Formative assessment may be described as assessment *for* learning, conducted *during* learning to promote student success[12,18,20]. Formative assessment gives students the opportunity to improve their learning, informing both the teacher and the student as to the appropriate next steps.

Guidance from the Tasmanian Department of Education[6] suggests the following strategies:

➜ clarifying, sharing, and understanding learning intentions and criteria for success,
➜ engineering effective classroom discussions, activities, and learning tasks that elicit evidence of learning,
➜ providing feedback that moves learning forward,
➜ activating learners as instructional resources for one another (peer assessment),
➜ activating learners as owners of their own learning (self-assessment).

> Regarded as "the cornerstone of assessment" and a "mark of good quality teaching", educators in our research reported that formative data enabled them to "really engage with students' work and [think about] where to go next with it, rather than just leaving a grade on it".

Tasmanian staff in our research used a wide range of formative assessment strategies.

➜ *Relatively formal assessment tools*, such as running records, ACER Performance Achievement Testing[4], Guttman charts, PM benchmarking, Single Word Spelling Test, Astronaut Invented Spelling Test, Oxford Word List, Writing-to-Learn strategies, and portfolios of student work samples.
➜ *Professional judgement*, based on careful observation of student engagement ("watching and listening") and in-class monitoring strategies to check for understanding and learning such as "tiny tests and worksheets".
➜ *Feedback*, not only between teacher and student, but also between teacher and parents/carers, among students (such as group feedback), and among staff. Many participants valued the 'parent voice' alongside the 'student voice' in assessing progress and success. Collegial feedback can involve 'learning walks', or 'walk throughs', together with subsequent reflective conversations.

> "You can see when they understand something. And the work that they deliver as well. You think, 'Yes. They've understood that. They've got that'. And if they don't, then we can go back over. We repeat it … So, for example, with our guided reading, I can see them starting to use the strategies that I teach them".

> "One of the greatest formative assessment strategies you can ever have is a daily or a regular conversation between a teacher and student … All you need to do is start a conversation".

SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT

Summative assessments are used to review what a student has learned[9] and to report on learning achievements at particular points in time. As assessment *of* learning[18], these assessments are usually conducted at predetermined times in the learning cycle and school year. They are generally linked to benchmarks and standards, and provide information that can be used to group and compare students**[6]**. Tasmanian staff in our research used two primary sources of summative data about students' literacy development.

➔ *In-school achievement testing* to evaluate progress against the Australian Curriculum Standards, involves A-E ratings across all learning areas as well as Progressive Achievement Tests (PAT)[4].
A-E ratings give valuable information on what students "know, understand and can do" at any given time[15] [(p.13)]. They are less capable of showing progress over time because they are relative (i.e. indicating performance below, at, or above the expected standard).

> "The achievement standards are a really good guideline about what your students should be able to do by the end of the year".

> "The A to E system, I think a lot of us find that it's very broad, and it's quite difficult often to show kids their progress because they might have gone from here to here, but it's still a C".

➔ *Standardised testing* is used to check for student growth over time and to measure schools' overall results against similar schools. Standardised testing has both fervent advocates and staunch opponents[11,13,14]. The most well-known form of Australian standardised test in relation to literacy is the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) test, in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9. NAPLAN has recently been reviewed and may be revised in response to the recommendations[16]. Participants in our research all were committed to NAPLAN as "one part of the bigger picture". They varied in how useful and valid they considered it for monitoring the effectiveness of literacy teaching and learning.

> "We look at our NAPLAN results to ascertain whether certain programs are useful. Our literacy program is running beautifully, so that's become quite evident now in our NAPLAN results".

> "NAPLAN … may be objectively reliable, [but] you're still marking a multiple choice test, so you don't actually know what the kid's brain process is to get to their answer".

> "We purely use the [NAPLAN] data to evaluate value-add.
And if we're seeing progress that's similar to similar schools or better, then we're satisfied because change takes time, improvement takes time".

REFERENCES

[1] Afflerbach, P. (2016). Reading assessment: Looking ahead. *The Reading Teacher, 69*(4), 413-419.

[2] AITSL (2011). *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers – Graduate Level*. https://www.aitsl.edu.au/teach/standards

[3] AITSL (2017). *Professional Standard for Principals*. https://www.aitsl.edu.au/tools-resources/resource/australian-professional-standard-for-principals

[4] Australian Council for Educational Research (2018). Progressive Achievement: Tests, Teaching Resources, and Professional Learning. Retrieved from https://www.acer.org/pat

[5] Bertrand, M. & Marsh, J. (2015). Teachers' sensemaking of data and implications for equity. *American Educational Research Journal*, 52(5), 861-893.

[6] Department of Education, Tasmania (2014). *Good Teaching: Quality Assessment Practices. Guiding Learning*. https://documentcentre.education.tas.gov.au/Documents/Good-Teaching-Quality-Assessment-Practices-Guiding-Learning.pdf

[7] Department of Education, Tasmania (2016). *Good Teaching: Data Literacy*. https://documentcentre.education.tas.gov.au/Documents/Good-Teaching-Data-Literacy.pdf

[8] Department of Education, Tasmania (2019). *Literacy Framework 2019-2022*. https://publicdocumentcentre.education.tas.gov.au/library/Shared%20Documents/Literacy-Strategy-Framework.pdf

[9] Flint, A. S., Kitson, L., Lowe, K. *et al.* (2019). *Literacy in Australia: Pedagogies for engagement* (3rd ed.). Melbourne: Wiley.

[10] Hempenstall, K. (2009). Research-driven reading assessment: Drilling to the core. *Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties, 14*(1), 17–52.

[11] Jones, B. D. & Egley, R. J. (2004). Voices from the frontlines: Teachers' perceptions of high-stakes testing. *Education Policy Analysis Archives, 12*(38), 1–34.

[12] Kennedy, E., Dunphy, E., Dwyer, B. *et al.* (2012). Literacy in early childhood and primary education (3-8 years). https://ncca.ie/media/2137/literacy_in_early_childhood_and_primary_education_3-8_years.pdf

[13] Lobascher, S. (2011). What are the potential impacts of high-stakes testing on literacy education in Australia? *Literacy Learning: The Middle Years, 19*(2), 9–19.

[14] Masters, G. N. (2010). *Teaching and learning school improvement framework*. https://research.acer.edu.au/monitoring_learning/16/

[15] Masters, G. N. (2013) Towards a Growth Mindset in Assessment. https://research.acer.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1017&context=ar_misc

[16] McGaw, B., Louden, B. & Wyatt-Smith, C. (2020). NAPLAN Review Final Report. https://naplanreview.com.au/

[17] Stewart, S., Te Riele, K. & Stratford, E. (2019). *Literacy Teaching Practice in Tasmanian Schools.* http://ecite.utas.edu.au/135644

[18] Stiggins, R. (2005). From formative assessment to assessment FOR learning: A path to success in standards-based schools. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 324-328.

[19] Westwood, P. (2009). Arguing the case for a simple view of literacy assessment. *Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties, 14*(1), 3–15.

[20] Wiliam, D. (2011). What is assessment for learning? *Studies in Educational Evaluation, 37*(1), 3–14.

UNIVERSITY *of* TASMANIA