Assessment and Motivation

In the ever-changing world of education, many schools are becoming less focused on sorting students into winners and losers and more focused on helping all students succeed at meeting standards. This change in focus "compels us to embrace a new vision of assessment that can tap the wellspring of confidence, motivation, and learning potential that resides within every student" (Stiggins, 2007, p. 22).

In order to keep up with the changing needs of students and to effectively inform instruction, teachers must use a variety of assessment tools. Traditional forms of assessment, such as quizzes, standardized tests, and multiple-choice tests, have been most often used for determining student progress and assigning grades. Although traditional forms of assessment have value, research has shown that if they are misused or poorly designed, the effects on student motivation can be detrimental and indeed demotivational.

Assessment for Learning

It is critical that all students experience the productive emotional dynamics of winning. Therefore, rather than continue to rely solely on assessments that verify learning (assessments of learning), teachers should also include assessments that support learning, or assessment for learning. Among the traditional forms of assessment—predictive, diagnostic, summative, and formative—the latter is most conducive to assessment for learning. (Note: Further discussion of these assessments is provided in a later reading.)

Formative assessment is used to inform teachers about students' progress, as well as about the success or failure of their instructional strategies. Using observations, anecdotal records, and other formal and informal assessment strategies, teachers
can adapt and revise their instructional efforts. Formative assessment also provides useful feedback to students. Because it occurs during the learning process, teachers can identify students’ strengths and weaknesses in a timely manner and support them accordingly.

**What Is Performance Assessment?**

Properly designed performance assessments are authentic tasks that result in the creation of meaningful products or performances. While students need to learn the traditional basic skills of reading, writing, and math, there are additional skills they will need in order to be successful in the workplace. Skills such as problem solving, critical thinking, and interpersonal communication must be taught explicitly. What’s more, students must be provided opportunities to develop and practice these skills. Performance assessment gives them these opportunities.

Traditional assessments are usually not designed to test those kinds of skills. Therefore, performance assessments have emerged as an alternative tool. Through performance assessments, students can demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of key concepts by doing something other than answering questions on a test. Students may make presentations or perform plays, interpret new information through music or dance, or develop a product.

Recent research supports the use of performance assessment, because we know that students learn best when they are active and engaged. Other traits of performance assessment, such as allowing students to choose a topic or a way to demonstrate their learning and providing authentic purposes and audiences, have proven to be very motivational for students. Motivated students take ownership of learning and pride in showing their work to others.
Five Characteristics of Performance Assessment

There are five key characteristics of performance assessment that teachers need to keep in mind:

- Learning is assessed for both knowledge and skills.
- Process is engaging and authentic for students.
- The task is rigorous, requiring students to stretch their understanding.
- The task follows a logical process and is coherent.
- The validity of the assessment results must be consistent.

Grant Wiggins, a well-known co-author of *Understanding by Design*, says assessment reformers are interested in assessment that is instructional, enticing, educative, revealing, and insightful. Performance assessments are valuable tasks performed by students that inform both the teacher and the student about progress and mastery of instructional goals.

In Module 2, further discussion of what performance assessment is will be presented. In addition, the topic of authentic assessment will be explored and useful examples will be provided.