

Assessment for Learning: Learning Goals

The use of entry and exit cards to monitor student learning and inform next steps.

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Action Research Question

If learning goals are posted and addressed explicitly on a daily basis, will students understand the purpose for their learning, be able to articulate what they have learned, and see connections between descriptive feedback and the learning goals?

Background

I was using learning goals in my classroom in an attempt to make students aware of the purpose for their learning and the interrelatedness of the curriculum expectations on a regular basis. That is, I was posting learning goals before the lesson. I was also employing the strategy of exit and entry cards as a method of assessing the students' understanding and/or attainment of the learning goals so that I could plan next steps. However, the students were not making the connection between the learning goal and the information they were sharing on the exit and entry cards. In fact, I was under the impression that they didn't truly understand the purpose for the cards. I discovered that the students were not making the connections because I was not showing them what to connect. I was not drawing attention to the learning goal throughout the lesson, nor was I making my entry and exit cards specific to the learning. They were too generic for this particular class—a group that needed more direction in order to accurately share their knowledge and understanding of the key learning.

This topic is of interest to me because I have been immersed in the literature around effective assessment practices for a number of years and have been experimenting with various strategies in various classrooms. I believe that assessment for learning is the key to delivering the best curriculum to each student in a classroom. It shifts the culture from one of teacher centred to one of a continuous student-teacher dialogue, which drives instruction and planning.

Summary of Information

Assessment is used to advance student learning. Assessment promotes learning when it is used to understand students' perceptions and understanding of outcomes, to inform instructional next steps, and to engage learners in the feedback process. In order for this process to be effective, assessment for learning strategies should be employed more often, with assessment of learning occurring after both teacher and student are aware of where the classroom stands in relation to the desired outcome(s).

Entry/Exit Cards are a quick way to get feedback from students about what they know and understand and what they do not. The card is structured so as to be related to a learning goal(s). The cards can be used upon entry or exit of the class. The teacher would then use the data from the cards to determine instructional next steps. These may include, but not be limited to, re-teaching a concept, differentiating the teaching for the whole group or a small group, conferencing, or moving on to the next learning goal.

Assessment for Learning Strategy

The use of entry and exit cards to monitor student learning and inform next steps.

Length of Study

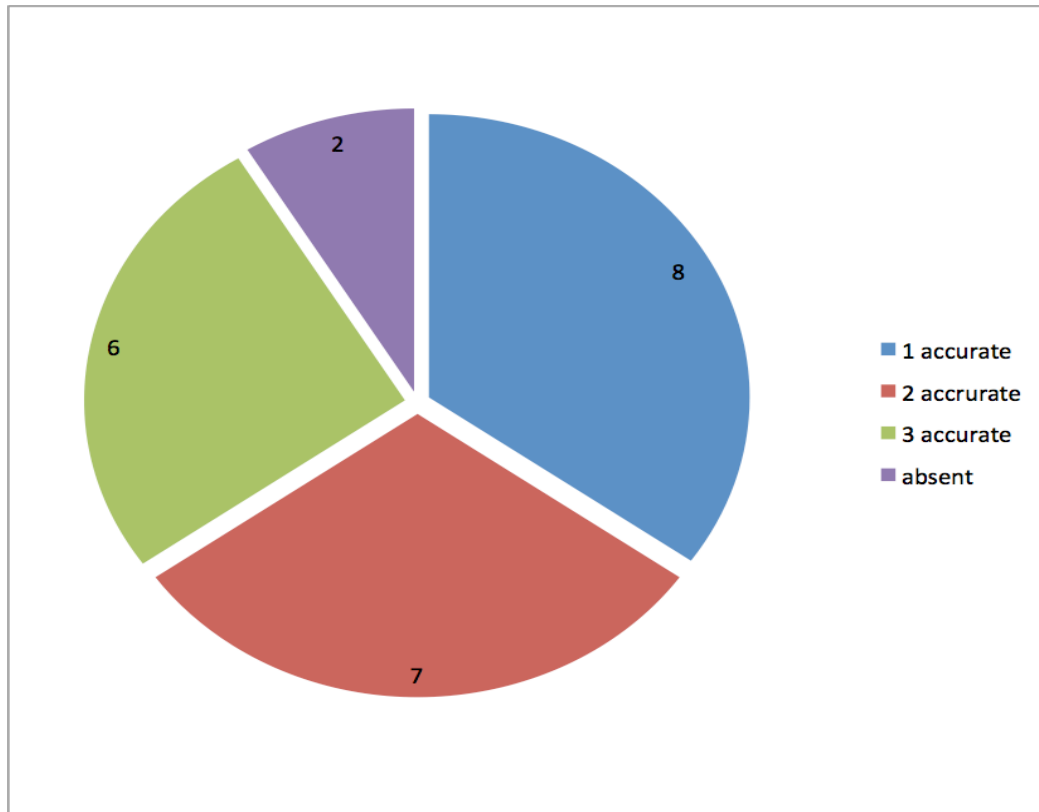
The study took place over one semester beginning in February 2010 and ending in May 2010. The strategy was employed with varied frequency. For example, sometimes the Assessment for Learning (AFL) cards were used twice per week, other times the cards were used more or less frequently depending on the learning goal.

Student Group

The study group was the entire grade nine academic level English class. There were 23 students comprised of 13 males and 10 females. This class was a typical academic class at LEPSS; that is, the group was not a “true” academic class. The culture of our school is such that many of our true applied level students select the academic environment. Therefore, this group was very mixed in terms of ability.

Starting Points

The following is a graph which represents the number of students who could accurately identify learning goals on an exit card on February 5, 2010.



These poor results were alarming. I began to question how I would be able to make feedback effective or meaningful if the learning goal was not truly understood, and I was concerned that the students did not understand what and why they were learning.

Monitoring Progress

My underlying teaching goal was to adhere to the principles of the pyramid of interventions as outlined by Dufour and Eaker (1998). The monitoring, then, was centered on the three foundations of this practice: knowing what we want our students to know and be able to do; knowing when they have learned what is necessary to move forward; knowing how we will respond if they are not learning (and if they are).

Exit and entry card data was compared with performance on assessment for learning tasks.

Damian Cooper's (2007) 10 Step Lesson Plan was implemented throughout the study:

- Identify the learning goal
- Activate prior knowledge
- Assess prior knowledge
- Present new learning
- *Check for understanding*
- Practice new learning/ scaffold new learning
- *Assess practice work*
- Review and consolidate (return to LG)
- Apply learning to new context
- Assess learning **or** evaluate learning

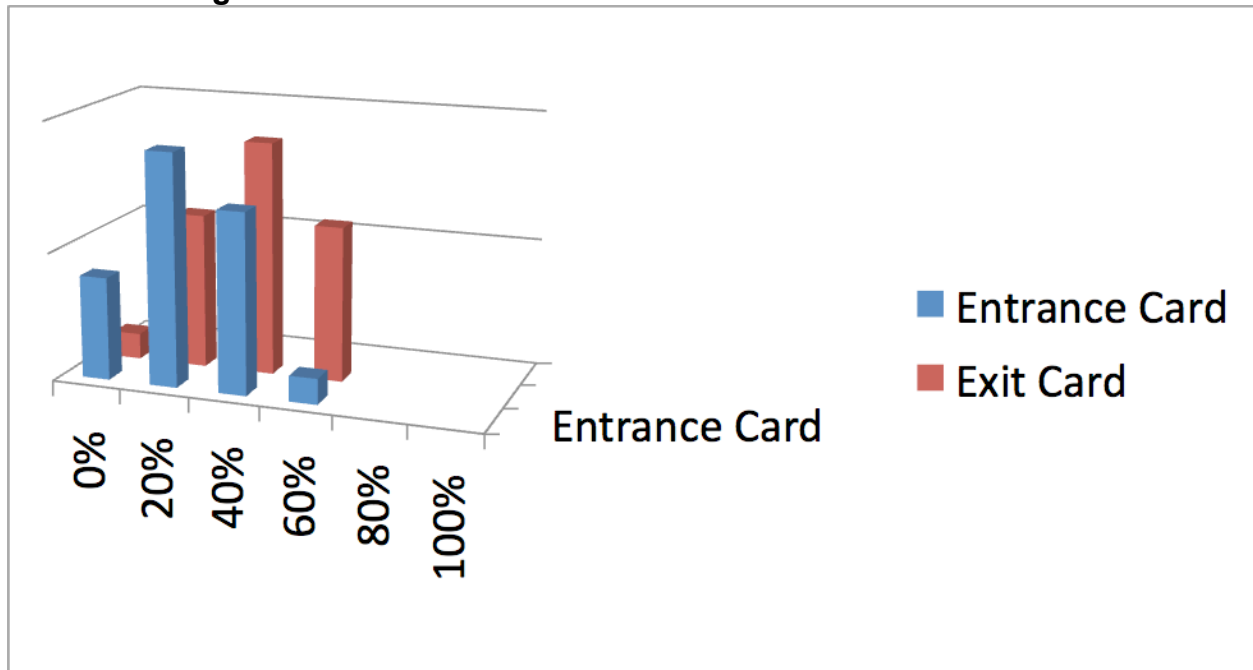
Teaching Actions and Strategies

- Focus on one learning goal for the lesson
- Post the learning goal in student friendly language
- Refer to the learning goal throughout the lesson
- Explain the relevance of the goal and connections to former learning
- Use exit and entrance cards as a means of assessing learning to inform instruction
- Determine what the students should know and do
- Identify which expectations will be met
- Identify a product which will demonstrate the learning
- Work toward this end by using learning goals
- Feedback on work addresses the learning goal specifically
- The language of assessment and the assessment strategies was being used in the classroom throughout the semester

Findings

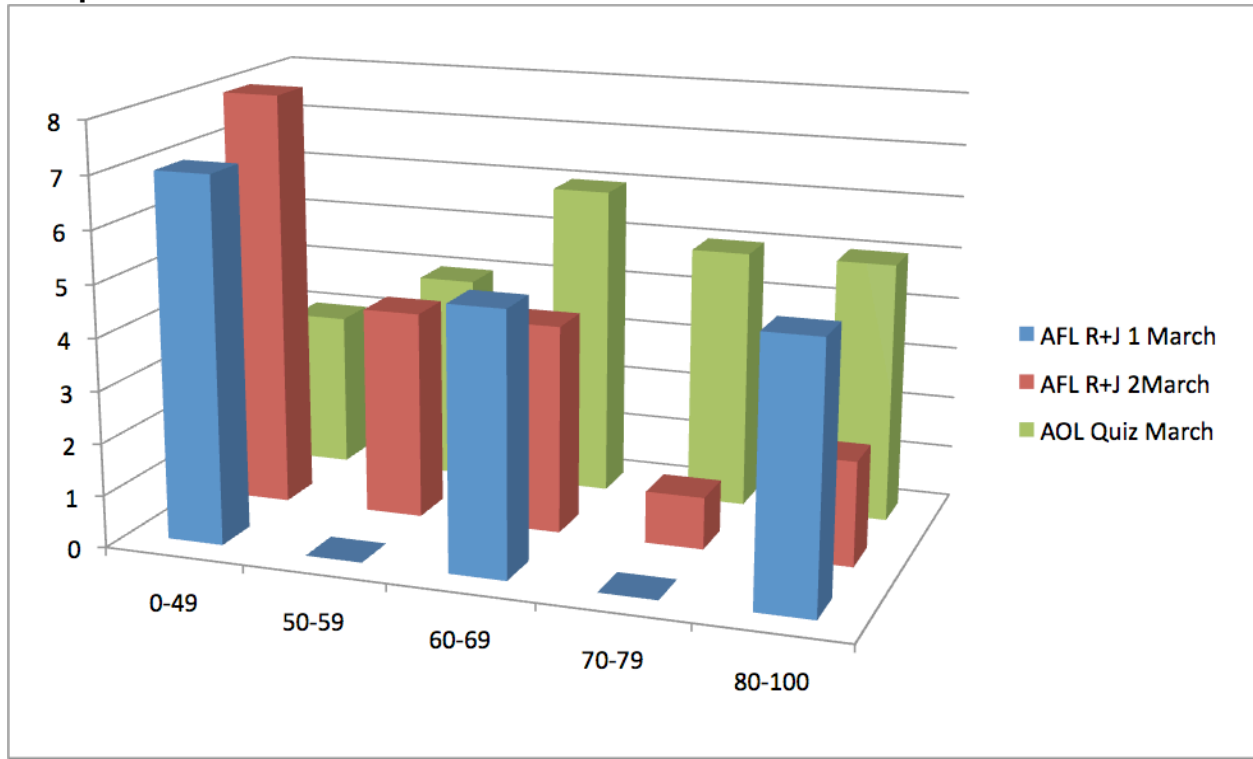
At times, entry cards were used to determine the students' readiness to move on early very early in the learning, then the same exit card was given after the learning. The graph below demonstrates that at times we have misconceptions about students' knowledge and abilities. Students may tell you that they learned something already, or know the concept, but this must be verified and then addressed, as below.

Comparison of Student Achievement: Entry Card Before Teaching; Exit Card After Teaching



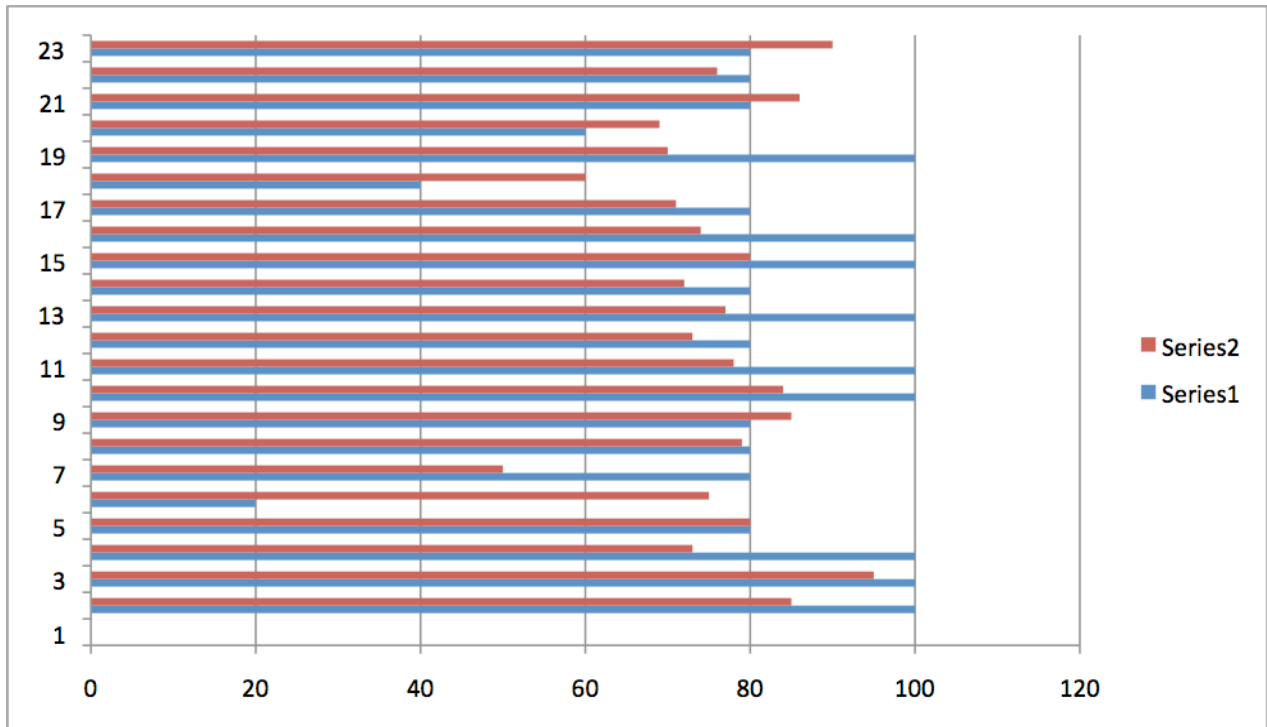
Below is data that suggests that the AFL entry card on March 1st suggested that students did not have a consistent understanding of the learning from the previous day's lesson. I realized that re-teaching needed to occur and another entry card was needed in order to ensure that a greater number of students had a better understanding of the learning before moving forward to the next learning and the quiz. The number of students who successfully demonstrated the learning was greater after the AFL strategy because I knew to adjust my teaching.

Comparison of Student Achievement on AFL cards and on Quiz



Some interesting findings include the graph below which indicates that some students performed better on the entry card than they did on the evaluation, suggesting that there was a gap between knowledge of the concept and the application of the concept. Every other time I used the entry cards, the learning goal was demonstrated directly as opposed to within a whole culminating activity. I was not entirely surprised by the results; what I found most interesting was the two students who scored very low on the entry card did much better on the final product. This was likely a result of the individual conferencing that I did with the students as a result of their entry card results.

Achievement on Entry Card Compared to AFL Product (Essay Writing)
Series 1 (Blue): Represents the achievement on the entry card
Series 2 (Red): Represents the achievement on the AOL Product

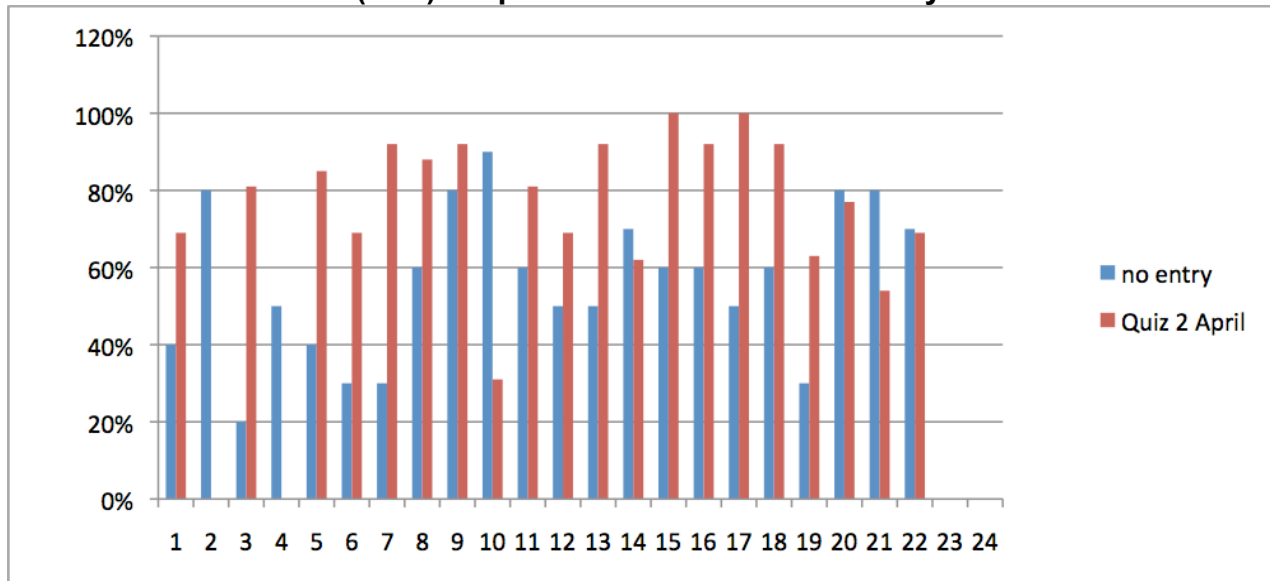


The final graph represents a comparison of student performance on two different quizzes throughout the semester. It is clear that students performed far better on the quiz when they were given entry and exit cards related to the learning goals along as AFL check-ins before the quiz.

Comparison of Student Achievement: Entry Cards Before Quiz and No Entry Cards Before Quiz

Series 1 (Blue): Represents % earned with no entry card

Series 2 (Red): Represents % earned with entry cards



Samples of Entry and Exit Cards

See appendix

Conclusions

My conclusions are very simple. The simple assessment for learning strategy of entry and exit cards is effective in terms of informing instructional next steps and improving student learning. These tools provide a quick snapshot of student learning. If the cards are specific and focused—directly related to the learning goal—the information that the cards provide is specific, rendering the teacher attention focused and precise, whether to the whole group, small groups, or an individual student. Using this tool is also a way to fulfil the balance of assessment; assessment for learning should be frequent and informative while assessment of learning should be after an extended period of study. Finally, I found that any feedback on assignments was easier to provide and more easily received as a result of addressing the learning goals explicitly both during instruction and on the entry cards. It helped me to focus on assessing for one learning goal at a time whenever possible.

My next steps are to collect data on the effectiveness of other AFL tools. I have been using a variety of tools in the English classroom, but I have not been collecting data. I would also like to measure the effectiveness of the same tool in different classrooms. For instance, would the exit and entry card strategy be as effective in an ENG 4U class? Or would a simple Met, Not Yet, I Noticed Feedback Card be equally effective with grade 9 applied students and grade 12 students?

Key Learnings

I now truly understand the importance of using the language of assessment in the classroom. By referring to learning goals, by telling students about the purpose of the entry cards, and by talking to students about assessment as I would with my colleagues, a culture of success was created in the classroom. Students responded very well to the AFL strategy and looked forward to their use: they told me that they found the cards motivating and felt that their voice was always being heard as I would adjust the lesson to meet the needs of the students as indicated in the cards. There was evidence of a shift in focus from teaching to learning.

Besides the improvement in achievement, this was the most rewarding aspect of the project. Never before had I had developed a collaborative relationship with the students with respect to assessment. Student participation and trust increased, and students appreciated that they contributed to the direction of lessons. Also, students responded well to feedback and could see the direct links between their learning.

Additionally, the feedback cards help to check learning without collecting volumes of homework nightly, which has reduced my “marking” substantially and increased the effective use of my time. The marking that I am doing is also less taxing as the achievement rates of the students have improved as a result of the AFL strategy.

One of the reasons that I wanted to focus on the single, simple strategy of using entry and exit cards is that I think it is a very non-threatening way to move a staff forward with AFL. It is easy to implement, track and modify. This information will be shared with the whole staff in September in an attempt to focus and support teacher efforts with assessment for learning.

Resources Used

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Appendix A

Assessment for Learning: Entrance Card

Name _____

Date _____

For the following sentences, identify which corrections or changes should be made to improve the writing and make the corrections on the line below. Then, beside the changes, indicate whether you EDITED or REVISED the writing.

- a) Chris Del Bosco came in fourth in his event on Sunday.

- b) We didnt win the hockey game on friday.

- c) When the anthem plays while the winners stand on the podium.

- d) Our Fans cheered wildly, at the snowboarding event.
There awesome athletes.

- e) The guy is interested in getting attention from the girl.

Assessment for Learning: Exit Card

Name _____

Date _____

For the following sentences, identify which corrections or changes should be made to improve the writing and make the corrections on the line below. Then, beside the changes, indicate whether you EDITED or REVISED the writing.

a) The basketball team lost they're game on Friday.

b) When the ice storm caused the schools to close.

c) My computer is made by toshiba its always crashing.

d) The character wants to be liked by the other guys.

e) have a little faith in the canadian olympic team.

Entry Card: *Romeo and Juliet* Acts II, III

Name _____

- 1) What is Friar's reaction to Romeo's proclamation of love for a Capulet?
a) angry b) surprised c) amused

- 2) What is the Friar's motivation for marrying the lovers in secret?

- 3) Provide one example of how CONTRAST is used in Acts II or III.

- 4) How does Mercutio die? _____

- 5) Why does Prince Escalus banish Romeo from Verona?

- 6) Circle the THEME that is developed by the street fight scene.
a) young vs. old b) passion vs. reason c) appearance vs. reality

What questions do you have remaining about anything we have read or discussed in Act II or Act III?

AFL Entrance Card

Name _____

Romeo and Juliet

What is the prologue? _____

Who delivers the prologue? _____

Where does the play take place? _____

Name one of Romeo's friends? _____

How many lines in a sonnet? _____