

Gathering quality assessment information

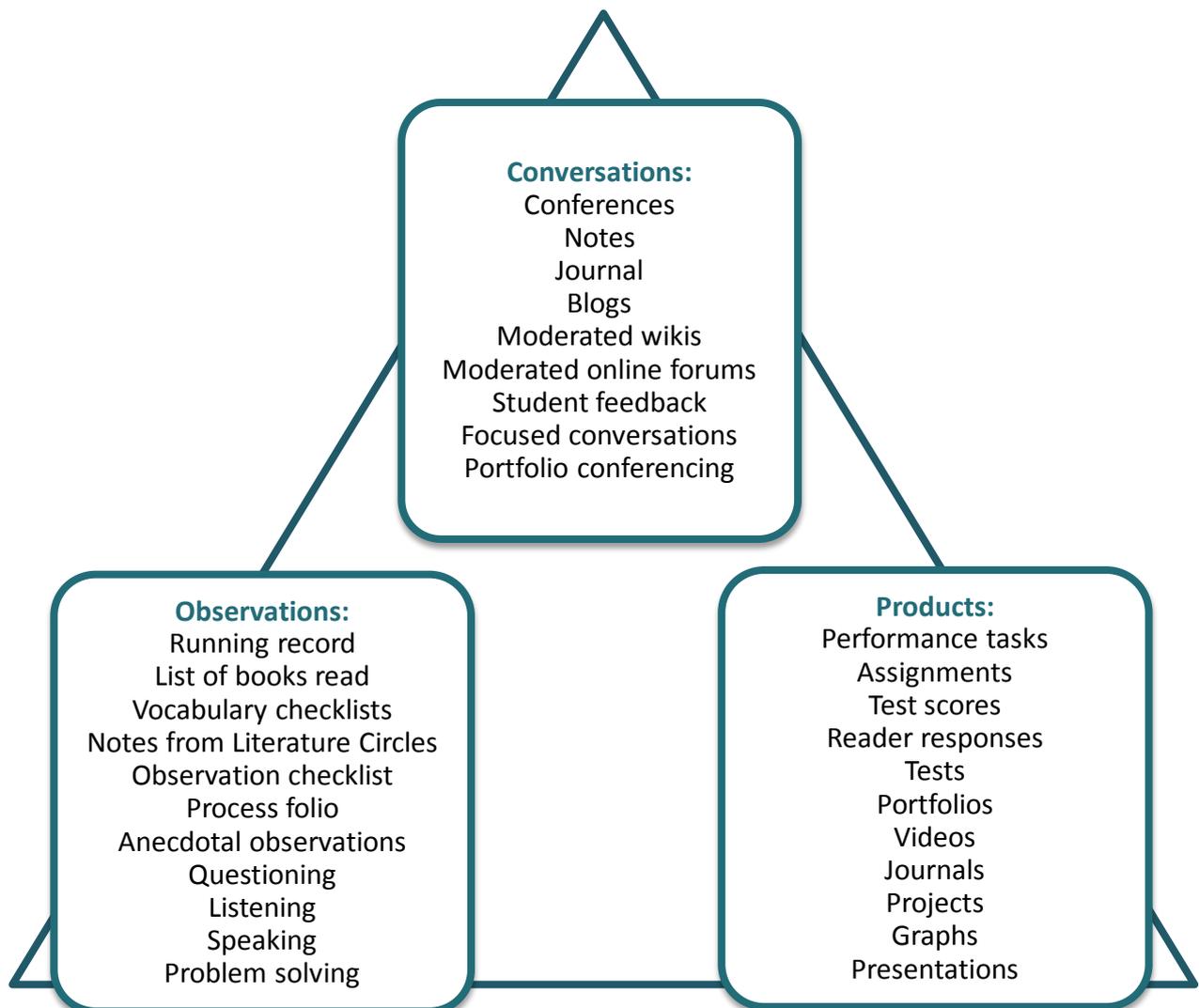
Teachers use a variety of assessment strategies to gather information about student learning, which may include formal and informal observations, discussions, learning conversations, questioning, conferences, homework, tasks done in groups, demonstrations, projects, portfolios, continuums, performances, peer and self-assessments, self-reflections, essays and tests.

Any information gathered needs to be able to be used to:

- adjust instruction and focus learning
- provide feedback

Triangulating assessment information

Assessment information should be triangulated and include: Conversations, Observations and Products (COP). Examples of COP assessment strategies include:



Ensuring quality information is gathered

Earl & Katz (2006) describe four basic principles or quality issues that are important in classroom assessment: reliability, reference points, validity, and record-keeping.

Reliability

In classroom assessment, reliability addresses the questions: How sure am I? How confident am I that this assessment process provides enough consistent and stable information to allow me to make statements about a student's learning with certainty?

If the assessment process is reliable, the inferences about a student's learning should be similar when they are made by different teachers, when the learning is measured using various methods, or when students demonstrate their learning at different times. When there is any doubt, there is probably not yet enough information to make a reliable statement.

To promote reliability:

- Use a variety of assessment tasks to provide a range of information. The more information gathered, the clearer is the picture of a student's learning profile.
- Allow students to demonstrate competence in a manner that suits individual strengths. For example, one student may choose to do an oral presentation to demonstrate understanding of a concept, while another may choose to complete a written text.
- Use a variety of systematic processes—for example, scoring keys, rubrics, rating scales, and continua—to make statements about student work in relation to the learning outcomes.
- Engage in moderation activities with other teachers to review student work. Bringing a collective insight about what is expected to the exercise results in more consistent determinations of what students understand.

Reference Points

In classroom assessment, there are three reference points teachers use when considering a student's performance:

1. How the is student performing in relation to some pre-determined criteria, learning outcome, or expectation (criterion- or standards-referenced).
2. How the student is performing in relation to other students at the same age/year level (norm referenced)
3. How the is student performing in relation to his or her performance at a prior time (self-referenced)?

Assessment *for* learning reference points

Syllabus learning outcomes or, for some students, learning outcomes of an individualised learning plan, are the reference points for assessment for learning.

They serve as guides in providing feedback and in planning instruction. Learning expectations that are clear and detailed, with exemplars and criteria that differentiate the quality and the changes along the learning continuum enable teachers to accurately consider each student's work in relation to these expectations.

Assessment *as* learning reference points

The reference points in assessment *as* learning are a blend of syllabus expectations and the individual student's understanding at an earlier point in time. Students compare their own learning over time with descriptions and examples of expected learning.

Assessment *of* learning reference points

Typically, the reference points for assessment *of* learning are the learning outcomes as identified in the syllabus. Assessment tasks include measures of these learning outcomes, and a student's performance is interpreted and reported in relation to these standards.

Validity

How well does the assessment measure what I'm trying to measure? Does the interpretation of the results lead to appropriate conclusions and consequences?

Validity of classroom assessment depends on:

- analysing the intended learning and all its embedded elements
- having a good match among the assessment aspects, the intended learning, and the decisions that teachers and students make about the learning
- ensuring that the assessment adequately covers the targeted learning outcomes, including content, thinking processes, skills, and attitudes
- providing students with opportunities to show their knowledge of concepts in many different ways (i.e., using a range of assessment approaches) and with multiple measures, to establish a composite picture of student learning

Record-Keeping

The focus of record-keeping in assessment *for* learning is on documenting individual student learning and annotating it in relation to the continuum of learning. The focus is also on identifying groups of students with similar learning patterns so that instruction can be efficiently differentiated. Teachers' records need to be based on syllabus learning outcomes, and need to give detailed accounts of student accomplishments in relation to these outcomes, with evidence to support these accounts.

In assessment *as* learning students are the key players in record-keeping. They need to develop skills and attitudes that allow them to keep systematic records of their learning, and these records need to include reflections and insights as they occur. Their individual records become the evidence of their progress in learning and in becoming independent learners.

Whichever approaches teachers choose for assessment *of* learning, it is their records that provide details about the quality of the measurement. Detailed records of the various components of the assessment *of* learning are essential, with a description of what each component measures, with what accuracy and against what criteria and reference points, and should include supporting evidence related to the outcomes as justification. When teachers keep records that are detailed and descriptive, they are in an excellent position to provide meaningful reports to parents and others. Merely a symbolic representation of a student's accomplishments (e.g., a letter grade or percentage) is inadequate.

Principles of Assessment

To further confirm choices of assessment tasks and processes, use the Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards' (2014) Principles of Assessment below to check how your chosen strategies 'measure up' against these Principles:

- Valid and based on syllabus outcomes
- Include criteria to clarify for students what aspects of learning are being assessed
- Enable students to demonstrate their learning in a range of different contexts
- Be reliable, free from bias and provide evidence that accurately represents a students' knowledge, understanding and skills
- Enable students and teachers to use feedback effectively and reflect on the learning process
- Be inclusive of and accessible to all students
- Be part of an ongoing learning process where progress is monitored over time.

References

NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA). (2014). *Principles of Effective Assessment*.

Retrieved May 15, 2014, from NSW Education Standards Authority: <http://syllabus.nesa.nsw.edu.au/support-materials/principles-of-effective-assessment>

Earl, L., & Katz, S. (2006). *Rethinking Classroom Assessment with Purpose in Mind*. Retrieved June 1, 2014, from www.wncp.ca/media/40539/rethink.pdf