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My Assessment Learning Journey and Experiences in EDUC 490 and 421

Assessment was something that I was really nervous about when I began my 4-week practicum. I had learned so much in class about both summative and formative assessment, but I was worried that I wouldn’t know how to apply it in the correct way. I was so thankful to have a coaching teacher who had such a variety of assessment strategies that she was willing to share with me once she realized how unsure of myself, I was. Once she shared her ideas and made assessment more tangible for my very practical, non-abstract thinking brain, I found myself being able to implement assessment more and more easily as the days passed by. Furthermore, I noticed that my formative assessment became stronger, and I found it easier to include summative assessment. My practicum journey has really helped me to further my understanding of assessment as learning, assessment for learning and assessment of learning.

Formative assessment was the type of assessment that my Coaching Teacher really noticed I was struggling with. She was extremely gracious and gave me so many ideas to try out and see if they worked for me and the students. My favourite formative assessment trick was the use of stoplight cards. The stoplight cards are something that the students were already familiar with and already had in their desks prior to my joining of the classroom. At first, I wasn’t even aware that this was a tool used by my Coaching Teacher because she had been using so many different strategies. In my first few lessons I would ask students to use a “thumbs up” or a “thumbs down” to show me their understanding of learning. However, this was extremely difficult to use because some students wouldn’t always have their thumb in the “proper” position, making it quite difficult to read the room! This is where the helpfulness of the stoplight cards came into my check for understandings. It allowed the students to really think about and process their own learning (i.e. whether they understood the lesson fully, partially or not at all) and then show me their understanding with either the green, yellow or red card. This was not only helpful for their own ability to reflect on their learning, but it also made it so much easier for myself, the educator, to read the room and see what learning had actually taken place. At the beginning of the lesson, when the students were asked to take out their stoplight cards and place them at the corner of their desk, the students had already been prepared, knowing that stoplight cards will be used during this lesson. Being prepared for assessment as learning, and the use of this type of formative assessment ensured that the students were practicing or developing the skills needed for the learning at this stage in the lesson (White 2017). Another reason why I enjoyed using the stoplight cards for the check for understandings is that I was able to see which students would need the extra one on one time to fully understand the concept at hand, allowing for better overall learning.

In conjunction with using the stoplight cards, I also used the trick that my Coaching Teacher likes to call “1, 2, 3, Show Me”. This was my go-to when checking for understanding with math. Each student had their own whiteboard in their desks and would use it while doing examples during the lesson. In order to make sure that the students were on the right track with their understanding I would say to the class “1, 2, 3, Show Me!” and all of the students would hold up their whiteboard so I could check it. This allowed me to have a visual of each child’s understanding, something that the stoplight cards didn’t necessarily do. The stoplight cards were of course, extremely helpful, as they allowed that necessary student reflection time. However, some students may think that they fully understand a concept in their mind, but the evidence to back it up doesn’t match. This is why I find it so important to use both in conjunction with each other to really assess where the students are at in their learning.

A type of “assessment as learning” that I used was at the beginning of my introductory to the food chain lesson. I had students participate in a think-pair-share with their desk partner and told them to think about their environment, bringing up places like the river just outside the school grounds (the class visited this place often for outdoor learning), Lheidli T'enneh memorial park, Cottonwood Island park, Forrest for the World, etc. and how the plants, animals and “other things” in those environments were connected. I proceeded to give a few examples from my own experiences since this question was slightly vague. Students would then share their ideas with their desk partners, and I would walk around checking for their understanding of connectedness within the environment. In Katie White’s work, she explains the importance of being mindful of students interests and experiences (White 2017). She explains that activating students interests and experiences is optimal to aid in expressing students best learning, allowing students to find meaning in learning and activate deep thinking (White 2017). This is what I wanted to do with my “assessment as learning” in the science lesson. By activating the child’s prior experiences and having them think about connectedness within their environment, I was able to check the student’s prior knowledge about the subject and use that information moving forward into my lesson. This particular lesson was full of “assessment as learning” as the next step included taking 22 different animals, plants and “other things” cut outs (all pre-cut and packaged) and having them sort and group them in any way that made sense to them. After they did this, and explained how they sorted them, I was able to look through each of their work and determine their prior knowledge on connectedness. Furthermore, this gave me insight on where I needed to take the next lesson and how to plan for it.

Summative assessment is another type of assessment that I was able to learn a lot about during my practicum. I was able to show this kind of assessment through a learning check, and a rubric for the good copy of the student’s opinion writing. I used a learning check in the middle of a math unit on place value in order to check for learning progress prior to teaching my observed math lesson. White suggests that once you have assessed your students, you are at the point where you can make a professional judgment as to whether you need to re-enter the learning because it is not where it needs to be, or continue onto the next learning goal (White 2017). This is what I needed to do in order to determine whether my students were ready or not to move onto the next step in our place value unit. When I gave the students the learning check, I needed to make sure that the students knew that this was not a test, it was just simply telling me where they are at in their math learning and if they’re ready to move on. This helped a lot with the students who experience anxiety in the class as they were able to perform to the best of their abilities, without the test anxiety affecting them. I found this very helpful because, although I had been tracking their progress via stoplight cards, “1,2,3, Show Me” and the worksheets, I was able to really determine what the students knew and what they were still struggling with. This allowed me to reteach the parts that didn’t stick as much as I’d hoped, and dive deeper into the parts that the students were exceling in.

Another summative assessment that I used was a rubric for the final copy of their opinion writing piece. My coaching teacher had introduced the writing topic of opinion writing and had the students write a letter to their parents, trying to persuade them into getting “the best pet” for their family. The following week, I added to this unit by having the students spend time working on a new opinion piece on whether they should or shouldn’t have afternoon recess (their job was to persuade me to agree with their opinion). The students spent the week brainstorming ideas and writing a draft of their paragraph, which I assessed and provided feedback for. Once the students had looked over my feedback, they wrote their final copy of their paragraph and I used a rubric to assess them. The rubric consisted of all the things that I had mentioned during the week: making sure each sentence had a subject, making sure that you had an introduction, 3 reasons and a conclusion, making sure that everyday words were spelled correctly, making sure that there were capitals when needed and periods at the end of sentences, and whether or not their paragraph was persuasive. By having this rubric, it allowed me to focus my marking to specific pieces of the paragraph and see how their writing had improved from their draft. It also allowed me to write a comment or a goal to work on for next time as they continued in this unit.

Overall, I found that I experienced a lot of growth this semester when it comes to assessment. In the EDUC 421 class I was able to learn about the different types of assessment and how to integrate them into my teaching. Whereas in my EDUC 490 practicum I was able to create specific assessments and implement them into different lessons. I feel like I am still learning so much and am nowhere near the end of the road on my assessment learning journey. However, I feel like I am off to a good start and as I move into my EDUC 491 practicum, I will learn even more and experience even more growth. I am excited to continue this learning journey and am so grateful that I have learned so much already regarding assessment.

References

White, K. (2017). *Softening the edges: Assessment practices that honor K-12 teachers and*

*learners*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.