

Assessment in Student-Centered Classrooms

Consider the following scenarios of how assessment is integrated into instruction in a student-centered classroom.

Mr. Levy's Ancient Greece Unit

Mr. Levy's Year six class is about to begin a unit on Ancient Greece. Prior to beginning the unit he poses the Essential Question, *How can we learn from our past?* He asks students to journal in their handheld computers about what they already know about Greece and what they want to know. During the unit, students explore, research, read, collaborate, and journal about the various aspects of life in Ancient Greece. They use this information to create a virtual museum of Ancient Grecian artifacts. Students use a critical-thinking checklist to assist them in developing their list of artifacts to include in the museum, and use the *Visual Ranking Tool* to designate which of these artifacts they believe are most influential in today's society.

Mr. Levy introduces a project rubric to help students (and parents) understand expectations and help them create quality work. While the students are developing their museum of artifacts, Mr. Levy monitors individual students' progress through conferences. The final virtual museum of artifacts is posted on the class Web site. At the end of the unit, students develop a list of reasons why the Greek empire fell and use *Visual Ranking* to prioritize the list. The final assessment, a unit test, includes a self-reflection of student learning during the unit.

Ms. Stewart's Probability Unit

Ms. Stewart's Year eight class is beginning a unit on probability in which they will learn about notions of *equally likely* by determining fairness of games. Ultimately, students will become designers for a toy company and create their own fair game. Curious about what her students' already know about the subject, she engages them in a game of *Paper, Scissors, Rock* and asks them, "Is this game fair?" She is surprised at how many students answered, "All games are fair, since you always have a chance at winning". She asks them to reflect on this activity and note how they can determine if a game is fair in their journals. This pre-assessment will launch the unit and create a place for students to look back and compare their own learning after completing the unit.

While students spend the next several class periods examining games for fairness, Ms. Stewart uses a variety of methods to assess whether her students are gaining some basic understanding of probability. She walks around the room with her clipboard, monitoring student progress and using checklists to evaluate their work. She also informally questions students to probe their understandings of the concepts. When she is convinced that her students have a basic understanding of probability, she groups them into game designer teams. She assigns the teams the task of creating a game and defending its fairness mathematically to the toy company's board of directors. Ms. Stewart wants to increase the likelihood that her students will be successful on this project, so she provides them with a project scoring guide, which clearly articulates her expectations for quality work. She is pleased at the high quality of her students' projects. She finishes the unit by asking students to look over their saved work for the unit, to choose a piece of work that shows how much they have learned, and explain in their journals how it does so. Ms. Stewart then has her students replay the game, *Paper, Scissors, Rock*, re-examining it for fairness. She instructs her students to compare these findings with their prior responses and to draw conclusions about what they have learned through the unit on probability.

