

Managing Assessment to Support Learning: A

Develop a school policy for managing student assessment to support learning.

This is the first of a set of three Briefs on Managing Student Assessment to Support Learning. Each of the set is concerned with an aspect of school-wide management of assessment. Each aspect is derived from research into the effects of assessment on student learning and well-being and steps that can be taken to ameliorate any negative effects and enhance any positive effects.

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- A** *Develop a school policy for managing student assessment to support learning.*
 - B** Build a positive and constructive ‘learning culture’ with the school.
 - C** Encourage a broad range of learning activities and learning outcomes.
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Formal assessment, especially high-stakes standardised testing, has been shown to have potentially detrimental effects on student learning for some students. However, it also yields information about student learning that can be used to guide and strengthen student learning. Using assessment for the benefit of student learning and well-being therefore requires careful management. It cannot be left to chance. The need for deliberate action and coordination within the school is clear. These Briefs provide the research basis and practical suggestions for such action.

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1. What is the research evidence?

High-profile assessment (especially formal testing) can have damaging effects on students, especially those who perform poorly (or expect to do so). Damaging effects include anxiety, poor self-esteem and de-motivation.

- Student anxiety rises when there is pressure to perform and can be debilitating when facing or experiencing failure. Girls are more susceptible to anxiety than boys.
- Low-achieving students typically have lower self-esteem than high-achieving students. Performance labels (such as 'failure') and peer-comparisons compound this.
- Low-achieving students can be overwhelmed to the point of giving up (in testing and in learning).

Student anxiety increases where the school's performance on external tests is a public issue and students feel pressure to perform.

Poorly managed assessment and assessment feedback can therefore widen the gap between low and high achieving students.

2. What are the implications for practice?

Teachers and parents need to be aware of these issues to avoid creating anxiety and feelings of failure.

The school needs a coherent policy on assessment with an emphasis on using assessment and assessment data to enhance the learning of all students.

The school should place all assessments in a wider context, de-emphasising the importance of any single assessment.

Assessments need to be managed so that all students are aware of progress in their learning and next steps they can take towards further learning.

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Implications for practice

Do:

- ✓ Emphasise learning goals rather than performance goals.
- ✓ Ensure that all assessments have positive effects and contribute to learning.
- ✓ Develop broad-based assessments for judging student progress in learning.
- ✓ Develop school mechanisms to monitor the effects of assessments on students.

Don't:

- ✗ Construct an aura of importance around any single assessment.
- ✗ Suggest that there will be sanctions for poor performance.
- ✗ Use tests (internal or external) as the sole arbiter of student and school progress.
- ✗ Focus on student performance to the detriment other personal attributes.



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Informing literature reviews:

Harlen, W., & Deakin Crick, R. (2002). *A systematic review of the impact of summative assessment and tests on students' motivation for learning* In *Research Evidence in Education Library*. London: EPPI-Centre, Social Science Research Unit, Institute of Education.

Harlen, W. (2004). *A systematic review of the evidence of the impact on students, teachers and the curriculum of the process of using assessment by teachers for summative purposes*. In *Research Evidence in Education Library*. London: EPPI-Centre, Social Science Research Unit, Institute of Education.

Harlen, W. (2005). Teachers' summative practices and assessment for learning: Tensions and synergies. *The Curriculum Journal*, 16(2), 207–223.

Research evidence and recommended actions found in these references informs this three Brief series. However, the advice in the Briefs is our interpretation and distillation of that research evidence and those recommendations.