

Managing Assessment to Support Learning: C

Encourage a broad range of learning activities and learning outcomes.

This is the third 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?

Any educational test is only a sample of possible learning outcomes.

Standardised tests can test only some aspects of desired learning outcomes.

A single-minded focus on preparing students for tests can narrow the curriculum.

A narrowed curriculum affects interest/motivation, which in turn affects learning.

Better outcomes follow broader learning—students taught well on a broad curriculum generally do better on standardised tests than students taught just to the tests and also acquire greater knowledge, understanding and skill beyond the narrow confines of the tests and are better equipped for their future.

2. What are the implications for practice?

It is important to cover a broad range of learning outcomes (in both teaching and assessment).

A single-minded emphasis on test performance should be avoided.

Performance on a single test should not be over-interpreted—there are all kinds of reasons why it may not be typical or representative of wider capabilities.

Allowance is needed for diversity of interests as well as for ways students can demonstrate what they have learned.

Recognise difference and provide appropriate accommodations for difference.

Always seek to create positive motivation for learning.

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Implications for practice

Do:

- ✓ Emphasise the full range of school learning aims.
- ✓ Develop broad-based indices of school success (including quality of learning experiences, the contribution of assessment to student learning, and personal attributes).
- ✓ Always interpret assessment data in context—by reference to other information about student learning.
- ✓ Provide variety and choice for student learning and assessment.

Don't:

- ✗ Allow tests to dictate the curriculum.
- ✗ Base decisions about future directions (for school, class or student) on results from a single test.
- ✗ Use drill and practice for test preparation.



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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.
