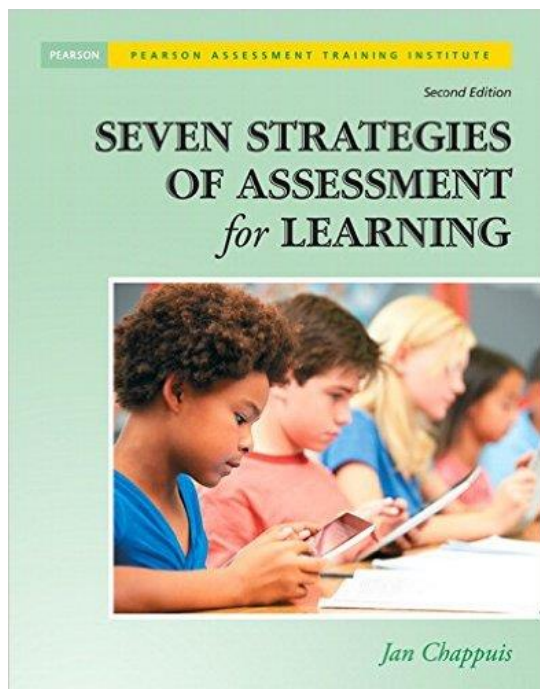


Book Review

A Standards-Based Approach to Assessment

“Seven Strategies for the Assessment of Learning” by Jan Chappuis

By Colin Everett



An era of standards and accountability continues in American education. Blamed for every conceivable economic and social shortcoming, American public schools have been charged with turning around our culture and country. The current path toward that turnaround is the Common Core standards. Assessment of learning today is in many schools a measure of either the Common Core, or standards written in the spirit of the Common Core. The assessment of learning is—in this current context—the assessment of these standards. Books like *Seven Strategies for the*

Assessment of Learning are designed to help teachers better align their instruction and assessment toward these standards.

The goal of *Seven Strategies for the Assessment of Learning* is to provide a practical guide for utilizing assessment as a means to foster students' academic growth. The book comes in a large reproducible page format. In addition to the text, a DVD containing teacher and student reactions to the book's processes is included.

Setting a clear and understandable vision of the learning target is the first strategy that the author presents. To progress this skill, prospective teachers should know that a learning target is “what students are to know and be able to do as a result of instruction” (34). Different types of learning targets, such as knowledge, reasoning, skill, and product level targets are modeled. Throughout the text, student examples range from kindergarten—“I can hear when music is loud or soft” (45)—to high school—“I can describe where mitochondria and chloroplasts come from” (49). One of the goals of a clear learning target is that it can set the basis for the construction of a workable and student friendly rubric.

The creation of a clear and effective rubric is the transition into strategy two: using examples of strong and weak student work. Using a rubric, students are encouraged to self-assess and be engaged in the process of defining

what constitutes quality work. For the author, a student friendly rubric is written in the first person with student friendly language. The text contains scripts and detailed processes for developing these rubrics for different subjects and grade levels. Once the rubrics are in hand, students should be provided with a sample and then individually generate a score with the rubric. Students should subsequently share their opinions with the whole class. Finally, students should discuss how the work measures against the rubric. In each chapter, about a dozen “activities” are described, such as “keeping a reflective journal” or a “think-pair-share.”

The third strategy focuses on providing effective feedback. Some of effective feedback’s characteristics are that it is focused on the learning target, occurs during learning, and addresses partial understanding. Feedback itself is bifurcated into success and next-step feedback. The author address some practical concerns, like advising against grading as a means of feedback until the “feedback has been acted upon” (104). Dialog forms, visual feedback, peer feedback, and student conferences are all examples of feedback covered in this chapter.

Self-assessment is the fourth strategy and the chapter begins, like most in the book, with a selection of favorable studies that provide research-based support for the chapter’s arguments and points of view. For example, the author launches this chapter stating that research repeatedly confirms that, “when students are required to think about their own learning and articulate what they understand and what they still need to learn, achievement improves” (146). Strategies to incorporate self-assessment include moving checkers and buttons (for young students), stars and stairs, checklists, and notes to home. After the self-assessment, students are guided to create a plan

as to what the student will do as well as the level of assistance, the when, the where, the materials needed, and finally, an identification of the “evidence the student will use to verify accomplishment” (185).

Figuring out the needs for focused instruction is one of the essential features of the author’s “feedback loop” that furthers a student’s understanding of the learning target. Strategy six continues this sentiment with examples of focused instruction, practice, and revision. The author stresses the importance of practice as an essential part of the learning process and cautions the teacher to only grade summative items and provide penalty free feedback on formative learning items. The usual collection of example rubrics, journals, and portfolios are included in the activity section.

The seventh and final strategy asks teachers to “provide students opportunities to track, reflect upon and share their learning progress” (269). Various metacognitive approaches, like tracking forms, learning logs, and student led conferences, are suggested and modeled.

Seven Strategies for the Assessment of Learning is published by Pearson Education, which is deeply involved in many facets of the field of education. The company strongly supports the Common Core and its business model revolves around the promotion of those standards and standards-based learning. Consequently, *Seven Strategies for the Assessment of Learning* ultimately helps the company fulfill these objectives. The book, which is a practical guide for the ideas the author presents in the general text, *Classroom Assessment for Student Learning: Doing it Right, Using it Well* (2012), strictly adheres to the standards-based educational approach, which serves as the basis for its entire program. Therefore, it offers no critique of this educational approach. Providing alternative

approaches and outlooks is an essential part of good instruction. The result is that the reader can be left with the impression that the goal of education is to achieve nothing more than the stated learning standard. Despite all of the rhetoric of a “student centered approach to assessment,” this approach never allows the student to create any of their own meaning from their education.

As with most off-the-shelf programs, the author’s intent is that the reader can take one part of the program or the entirety of the approach. Educators who teach courses for pre-service teachers on assessment might be disappointed in this book, particularly if they are looking for something innovative or a fresh approach or ideas to supplement what can be found in their existing materials. Further, some fundamental concepts of assessment, like creating effective constructed response items or distinguishing effective multiple-choice distractors, were notably omitted. For educators whose compass points toward the standards-based approach to learning, this text may be quite helpful. However, those who perceive education as having a broader or more diverse purpose might want to look for another guide to assessment strategies.

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About the Author

Jan Chappuis has been an elementary and secondary teacher as well as a curriculum developer in English/language arts, mathematics, social studies, and world languages. For the past 25 years, she has written books and developed workshops focused on classroom assessment literacy. A nationally recognized expert in the area of formative assessment, she has presented both nationally and internationally. After working at the Assessment Training Institute in Portland, Oregon for twelve years, Chappuis is currently an educational

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About the Reviewer

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