

## Assessing to Empower Learners

Course

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Why Do We Assess Student Learning? [5:28]

[https://players.brightcove.net/2566261579001/HyuWsfFhb\\_default/index.html?videoId=6089806441001](https://players.brightcove.net/2566261579001/HyuWsfFhb_default/index.html?videoId=6089806441001)

About

Learn three compelling reasons to assess student learning in the library.

Transcript

Why do we assess student learning? The first reason obviously is to empower our students. We don't assess to assign a grade or to do an endpoint. What we do is we teach students through our assessment what good work looks like and how they might modify their work to achieve success. It's interesting because students don't know how much they like feedback until they get substantive feedback and they find out, "Okay, this is what it needs to look like. I understand." Then they can make their own judgments about how much effort they want to put in and how well their work meets the mark and they develop their own bar of achievement.

What I find is that then students become empowered; they become willing to invest because they have their eye on what it looks like to be successful. It's a process of learning rather than interrupting their learning to offer them a grade.

What I find is that when we assess student learning, we're actually building trusting relationships with them. Students learn to trust the librarian, and there are several ways that we build that trust through assessment. First of all, we have to be very clear in our learning goals. What do we expect students to be able to do? When they understand that, most often they're going to work to achieve it.

We have to be trusted to then teach them the skills that they need to learn in order to complete their assignments. Be sure that then when you assess, your feedback is around how they have used what you have taught. Librarians also need to trust students. Usually we think about students trusting teachers but now we're talking about, we need to also trust our students—that they're going to commit to the learning.

There are essential elements to build trust between librarians and students. There has to be a clear positive intent on both sides. There has to be authenticity, that the skills that they're learning really apply to the content that they're learning and that they're going to be able to demonstrate their use of the skills in an authentic way and we need to provide support for each student to achieve success. That support is not going to look identical for each student and that's why the individualized approach to assessment is so valuable.

Essentially, what we do with assessment, is to move students through their zone of proximal development, which is learning theory by Lev Vygotsky. I don't know if you're as enamored of the zone of proximal development as I am, but essentially what it means is that all of us have a zone for new learning. We know this amount, and we can get to this level with support and with provocation—somebody asking the tough questions to push us. Then we reach that upper level and we can set a whole new zone of development. It's a really wonderful way to think about the process of learning and how you gradually build competence on your own competence that you already have, and then reaching just a little beyond where you would get without support and provocation. We certainly have a role in moving our students to higher levels of their zone and setting new zones. Think about that zone of development for every student as you're working with them on assessing how they're doing, and then what are the next steps to move them to the next level of their zone.

Assessment is also important for librarians; I've talked a lot about what it does for students (empowering them and building trust with them and moving them through their zone), but what assessment does for librarians is it enables us to individualize instruction. As we assess, we know where every student is and we can provide specific support and guidance and provocation, if that's called for, to move individual students to the next step in their learning.

What we can do with this assessment is to create a whole environment of success. When students experience success and they share that with their peers, it creates a climate that we're all in this together and we're all going to be successful, and we're going to achieve this learning goal together. Assessment is not a "gotcha." It's not a grade. It's not an endpoint. It's not an evaluation. It is a way to provide support and guidance in an atmosphere of trust and success.

Activities

**What's Your Why?**

**Reflect and Practice:**

Dr. Stripling describes how assessment can help empower students, build trust between students and educators, and help librarians individualize their instruction so students expand their zone of proximal development. Reflect on what you would like to accomplish through assessment practices in the library. Why are you motivated to use assessment more effectively? Where do you see room for improvement? What questions do you currently have about effective assessment? Use the questions in the document below to help you form an assessment statement of purpose. Add to and adjust this reflection as you continue through the workshop.

**Resource:**



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**Packet**

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[Annotated Bibliography.](#)

MLA CITATION

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