

Assessment for Student Learning

Assessment for student learning has two subdimensions. *Assessment* refers to the systems, structures, and strategies the teacher has in place to gather real-time information related to student understanding and performance. *Adjustments* refer to how the teacher makes real-time, in-the-moment changes in her lesson to respond to her assessment of student understanding.

Subdimension: Assessment Jacob created multiple opportunities for assessment in this lesson (whole class talk, partner talk, and individual work time). I am unsure what he actually assessed about the learning of his students during these times, however. For example, initially, Jacob asked the students to share what they remembered about finding perimeter. Four students called out responses, including “you add up the sides,” “you put your toothpicks there and count how many there are,” and “you use a ruler,” and “you plus the length and width.” I am not sure what Jacob noticed about these comments. The third student who spoke (“you plus the length and width”) revealed a misconception. I am curious if Jacob heard this comment and how he interpreted it. The other comments revealed that some students were conflating measurement with calculating perimeter. I would like to ask Jacob what he heard and if the comments surprised him at all. Jacob asked the student who had mentioned the toothpick strategy to share at the front of the class but did not probe the other comments.

Jacob also included a time for partner talk and individual work; both of these represent opportunities for assessment. During the partner talk, Jacob did not circulate and it is unclear how he selected students to share out. From my position in the classroom, I was able to hear several partnerships. Some of them seemed to understand the toothpick strategy but not its purpose. Others seemed unconvinced by the strategy and preferred to use the ruler. One student seemed to be confusing addition and doubling. “She could also use the straws to measure one side and add it by two . . . or she should

just measure one side and times it by two.” I am not sure if Jacob noted this. During the individual work time, Jacob did circulate and observe students working on their computation. I am not sure what he learned about the class’s strategies at this time. He gave one student some feedback about copying the figure from the board. I do not think he heard the conversation between the two students near me (tick marks versus “making tens”). Interestingly, this individual work time was not directly connected to the objective. Had he gathered information at this time, it would have been about computation skills, not about the concept of perimeter or any other geometric reasoning. The partner talk was also not explicitly connected to the objective or transferable skills. *The principal knows that high-quality instruction should create opportunities for students to demonstrate their learning and she has identified multiple opportunities that were largely missed by the teacher during the course of this particular lesson. Notice how the partner-talk moment returns again here, this time in terms of assessment opportunities.*

These multiple assessment opportunities had the potential to provide lots of information to Jacob. Students who did not feel comfortable speaking in front of the whole class had the chance to speak with a partner or to work individually. I wonder how Jacob scaffolds students (particularly quieter students and ELLs) so they can share their thinking with the whole class. I also wonder if Jacob sees the potential to gather lots of data at all these different times. I would like to work with him on the habit of circulating and listening to student conversation throughout the lesson while keeping his objective in mind. Jacob might also benefit from collecting student notes at the end of his lessons because this is such a large class. I am not sure if he has this habit. It seems he has the structures in place that could support assessment but not the habit of listening. How does Jacob decide what to assess? Does he typically assess procedures and not thinking skills? In future visits I would like to study this. Furthermore, I am curious how Jacob tracks what he learns about student learning. *Here the principal considers how she will support Jacob’s growth in this dimension. The principal knows that teachers (not just Jacob) routinely miss opportunities to assess student learning when they do not employ disciplined methods of just-in-the-moment assessment such as listening to student talk and jotting notes. In addition the principal is cognizant that Jacob (when he does assess in the moment) may only be assessing procedural understanding rather than the student thinking work necessary to develop conceptual understanding.*

During the portion of the lesson I observed, Jacob did not provide students with an opportunity to self-assess or reflect. All feedback on student answers came from Jacob. The preassessment question, “Who remembers how we learned to find perimeter?” provided some opportunity for students to recall previous learning but this moment was limited for several reasons. Jacob did not probe student answers or ask them to think about their own personal strategies, level of understanding of them, or their effectiveness. Additionally, only four students shared. Jacob could have asked students, “What do you think perimeter means? How well do you think you understand perimeter on a scale of 1 to 5?” or “Based on this lesson, what will you try in the future when you figure out perimeter? Why? What is the most important thing you learned about perimeter? What do you still need to work on?” I am wondering why reflection is not a routine part of Jacob’s practice. I would like to ask him about his own habits of reflection. Does Jacob see value in reflection? How does he see it as connected to students transferring what they learn? *The principal understands the importance of student self-assessment and posits a theory that either Jacob does not use the habit of reflection in his own learning or perhaps if he does, he has not translated that habit to his own teaching practice.*

Subdimension: Adjustments I have a lot of questions for Jacob regarding the connections between assessment and his teaching decisions. I noted that Jacob asked Hillary to model her strategy at the board and that her strategy happened to be most closely related to the lesson’s stated objective (using toothpicks to measure perimeter). I am not sure if he preselected her or selected her in the moment based on her comment. It is also possible that Jacob had not intended to ask a student to model but that when he heard Hillary’s comment he chose to invite her to the front. When Hillary came to the board and started her demonstration, she got stuck and Jacob asked the class to turn and talk to address the problem she had experienced. This seems like a decision based on his on-the-spot assessment of her needs. It is possible that he planned to have a turn and talk during the modeling ahead of time but chose when based on his observations. I would like to ask Jacob about when he made these various decisions.

However, I am also concerned about the amount of student confusion about finding perimeter that went unaddressed. Based on student comments during the preassessment and in the turn and talks, I wonder if students needed more time to discuss the concept of perimeter before moving into the procedures. After

hearing the range of comments in the first whole-class sharing time, I would have asked students to turn and talk to elicit more student responses. I would have asked all partners to share and might have charted their responses, following up on each one with “why do you think that?” or “what would that allow us to see?” or “what do you mean by that strategy? Could you show us?” Also, based on the partner conversations about Hillary’s modeling, I would have given students another perimeter problem to try with a partner and then discuss with the class. This added layer of support might have helped more students grasp the concept. *Here the principal is using her own in-the-moment assessment of student learning to make specific recommendations for the teacher’s instructional decisions. Notice how these recommendations allow the teacher to have a window into student thinking, which could then further inform his own teaching moves.*

Jacob made two clear adjustments in the lesson. While Hillary was modeling, he chose to ask the class to turn and talk about how to help her solve the problem she encountered. He must have suspected that the students had ideas about how to help her. The content of this adjustment did not really address the concept of perimeter. Most of the conversations addressed the difficulty of holding a straw and using it to measure, a largely logistical concern. It seems Jacob is most comfortable making logistical or procedural adjustments in the lesson. He seems to value making sure students know what to do, perhaps more than he values their knowing why or how it might help them in the future. The other obvious adjustment occurred when Jacob chose to tell Hillary the definition of a rectangle (opposite sides are equal) and its implications for perimeter when John raised this issue. At this time there seemed to be some tension in the classroom. Rather than asking the class to puzzle this out—and recognizing a gap in Hillary’s understanding—Jacob chose to tell the class the answer. It is unclear whether or not Hillary (or the class) left this experience with a clear understanding of rectangles.

There were other opportunities for Jacob to capitalize on or explore students’ existing and emerging knowledge of geometry. For example, when John shouted, “It’s the same!!! You don’t have to measure the top.” Jacob could have pressed him about why he thought this. I am not sure whether Jacob did not pursue these opportunities because he did not notice them, did not know to do so, or did not know how to do so. It is also possible that Jacob wanted to move the students on to calculating perimeter on their own. I am not sure whether or not he noticed some students’ confusion about how to add the

numbers up efficiently or whether or not he noticed an absence of larger conceptual knowledge about rectangles in general. I wonder if Jacob was more concerned about Hillary's feelings in this instance than the classes' learning. It is possible that Hillary does not typically share in the class and he wanted her to have a positive experience. *In this analysis the principal uses her keen eye not only to see when the teacher made adjustments in his teaching but also when the teacher missed opportunities to make further adjustments. Notice how the principal uses "wonder" statements when she has limited evidence to come to a firm conclusion. She will use what she notices and wonders about to focus the follow-up conversation with the teacher.*

Formative assessment of student learning, not just student procedures, is an important next step in Jacob's practice. Before suggesting some professional learning opportunities for Jacob, I would like to talk with him about how he understands formative assessment at this time. How does he gather information currently? What does he notice about student performance on formal assessments? Is he typically surprised by results? What did he learn about his students today? How does he track that information? Jacob helped one student one-on-one in this lesson. Was this a reaction to something he observed today? How does he design learning plans for students with certain patterns of behavior or understanding? How does he use formative assessment to plan small-group or individualized instruction? *The principal understands that formative assessment is critical for purposeful instruction. In the spirit of formative assessment, the principal plans on assessing Jacob's understanding so that she can guide and support his next steps to improve his teaching practice.*