**Dialogue Paper**

Abigail Giannetta

200467163

March 6, 2024

ECS 401: Educational Assessment

Chris Atkinson

Assessment has always been a source of anxiety and confusion for me. In the classes that I have taken throughout my time at the university, professors have only mentioned assessment in the context of either being summative or formative. However, there was never a real explanation as to how they differed or what makes an assessment most effective within the classroom context. As we continue our journey as educators, we must gain insight into how to properly and effectively assess our students. For this paper, I have chosen to touch upon my burning questions about assessment and gain the perspective of educators with real experience to alleviate my anxieties and provide some clarity. The paper consists of my conversations with one of my professors Dr. Tomin and my cooperating teacher Mr. Longmoore. Although they may have completely different experiences and levels of education, I believe they both shared some incredibly helpful information regarding the intimidating conversation surrounding assessment.

The first question to start the two interviews was How do you view assessment within the context of your teaching? Dr. Tomin responded by explaining that assessment is an ongoing practice, and she is constantly doing her best to get a sense of students' preparedness to learn. While her experience with post-secondary students may have less instructional time, and I was vastly different than teaching high school ELA, she said "I still do my best to 'check in' with my students." I found this answer to be quite poignant and comforting in a way. Growing up, I always thought my teacher's used assessment as a tool to judge their students. It felt as though they only cared about the numbers of our grades and how that reflected their reputations as educators. However, treating assessment as though it is a tool to check in on students and make sure they are moving forward has a much more positive effect on both the teacher and the student's mindset. Mr. L's answer was also very pleasing as he treats assessment as an opportunity for his students to show what they know and co-construct meaning with himself and others. Assessment for learning will continue to be critical and he wants to foster that critical thinking in his students as much as possible.

The second question that was discussed was their preferred method to assess students and their opinion on the most effective method within their experience. Dr. Tomin responded with a preference to integrate choice or flexibility wherever possible, usually in multi-part assignments that involve showing understanding, applying concepts, and then reflecting on the learning process. While teacher education is often criticized for focusing too much on reflection, she believes reflection - if focused on a meaningful task - is critical to consolidating new knowledge.

Similarly to Dr. Tomin, Mr. L claimed that providing a variety of options for students is the most effective method whenever possible, as students should ideally be able to show their learning in ways that are gratifying, and strengths based.

The third question we discussed revolved around strategies used to provide positive and constructive feedback. I have always viewed feedback as central to assessment practice. During these interviews, my beliefs were shared. Dr. Tomin explained that for her, feedback is more important than the grade an assignment is given, and she thinks about feedback both for specific assignments and across an entire course. She went into depth about how she tries to begin her courses with a low-risk assignment that helps students show what they know, and she does her best to provide a ton of feedback on those assignments. They were central to helping her focus on students' strengths and get a sense of their learning goals, and also helped her to build connections through the feedback process (often positive); when her class moved towards more difficult assignments, they had often established rapport so constructive feedback can be received as supportive. Mr. L, again, had a very similar attitude towards feedback as he also acknowledged the importance of building a student's confidence through feedback and creating academic and personal growth. He claimed that his goal was to generate and identify spaces for growth as opportunities or as questions for reflection and highlight how the strengths a student has (e.g., creative topics in lesson planning) can help bolster areas where growth might be desired (e.g., finding similarly creative ways to transition between parts of a lesson). Overall, everyone agreed that feedback is the most important part of any assignment in teacher education. However, when a teacher is putting so much thought and effort into feedback it does mean they may require a longer grace period when returning grades.

Finally, the last question discussed in the interviews involved discussing the tools used to help with assessment and how to incorporate technology as a tool for assessment. Dr. Tomin and Mr. L had an almost identical answer to this question. They both spoke heavily about the awesome power of rubrics. Dr. Tomin claimed, "Although nothing groundbreaking - Rubrics are an incredible tool, as they help to communicate expectations and also keep me on track." Dr. Tomin also mentioned the method of audio-recorded feedback as a more personal tool of communication. Mr. L mentioned using Google Sheets to keep track of notes, accommodations, extensions, etc. for assignments; while this isn't about assessment per se, it helps reduce stress for both him and his students when they both know that he won't forget about an extension he has approved or anything he needs to keep in mind as he grades. After hearing both of these answers, I love the idea of giving multiple forms of feedback: on longer assignments, I think I will try to embed comments in Word documents and consolidate feedback in written form, alongside a marked-up rubric. Dr. Tomin mentioned having multiple points of feedback and how that can often help provide both specific and general feedback to keep track of personal thinking about an assignment as they are graded.

After finishing each interview, I can successfully say that my anxieties surrounding assessment have been alleviated in some capacity. I think that each method and philosophy used by the two educators made me feel as though assessment itself was not a distant and confusing monster to be feared but a tool to embrace and encourage growth within myself and my students. I really enjoyed the idea of incorporating choices and flexibility within my teaching and assessment practices. I think this could definitely alleviate many anxieties associated with assessments for students and marking assessments for teachers. I also think that incorporating extensive feedback could also help alleviate those anxieties as well. Overall, I am grateful for the opportunity to discuss these questions with my teachers, and I hope to incorporate them within my teaching in the future and in my pre-internship.