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A teacher is called upon day after day to assess the children in her classroom. She must decide if they are socially able to interact with the other students, if they are capable to master the curriculum she instructs, and a myriad of other tasks. As an educator, I have often pondered the role of assessment in my classroom. Will I rely on lots of formal assessments to judge my students' progress, or use a mixture of formal and informal assessments? Each day I assess my students, and I must learn to use effectively this time.

One way that I assess my students is through informal assessments. While students are working on assignments, I like to observe them. I can learn who understands the assignment by the way that they work. Asking questions is another informal method that I use to check for understanding with my students. While presenting a lesson, it is important for a teacher to assess how well the student understands. It is not practical to make them take a test or quiz, but short questions can achieve this objective. A teacher should spend time observing her students so that she can understand their actions.

I believe in pre-testing students to assess their previous knowledge of a subject. Without this, I cannot adequately prepare my lessons to the ability level of my class. Sometimes this assessment will be formal, as in the form of a test. For example at the beginning of the year, I could give my students a test to assess their knowledge of basic American History. I could then use the information gathered on this test to help

plan the time spent on certain units throughout the course. Other times, the assessment will be informal, such as asking probing questions to find out prior knowledge. Pre-testing is a great asset to a teacher who desires to optimize the instructional time with students.

Formal assessment of students should test their higher order thinking skills. If giving a test, I should make sure it tests more than simple memorization. In my history classrooms, I like to give many different types of formal assessments to make sure the students grasp the material. I feel that if you always have the same type of test, then you are not challenging the student's mind. Assessments need to challenge students and foster higher-level thinking.

Every day that we teach, we assess our students. Our informal assessments of their actions and their clothing, relates to how we feel about the students. Their scores on formal assessments also help us to pass judgment upon students. As teachers, we must learn not to let negative assessments impact the way we deal with students. We must strive to have a positive outlook, and not use personal bias. Assessment is a tool that we must use in a constructive manner when dealing with students.