

The
ASSESSMENT Primer
Creating a Flow of Learning Evidence

Ruth Stiehl
Les Lewchuk

IN MEMORY OF

Madge Stiehl Walden 1916-2005
We are carrying on your work, Mom.

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The Learning Organization

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	<i>Mr. Fox, . . . you should have remained in Boston.</i>	

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The Story

The sea is around us, but the river is in us.

The Metaphor

Water transforms the earth; learning transforms us.

Re-envisioning Learning as a Journey

There is an unstoppable drive that powers every water molecule on the earth.

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The Take-Out—Creating “Robust” Outcome Statements

“Communicates effectively” is not very useful.

The Boulder Garden—Creating a Capstone Experience

The best rapids are in the lower half.

The Rapids—Creating Assessment Tasks

The river dunked and drenched; mostly it made them work.

The Put-In—Defining Essential Content

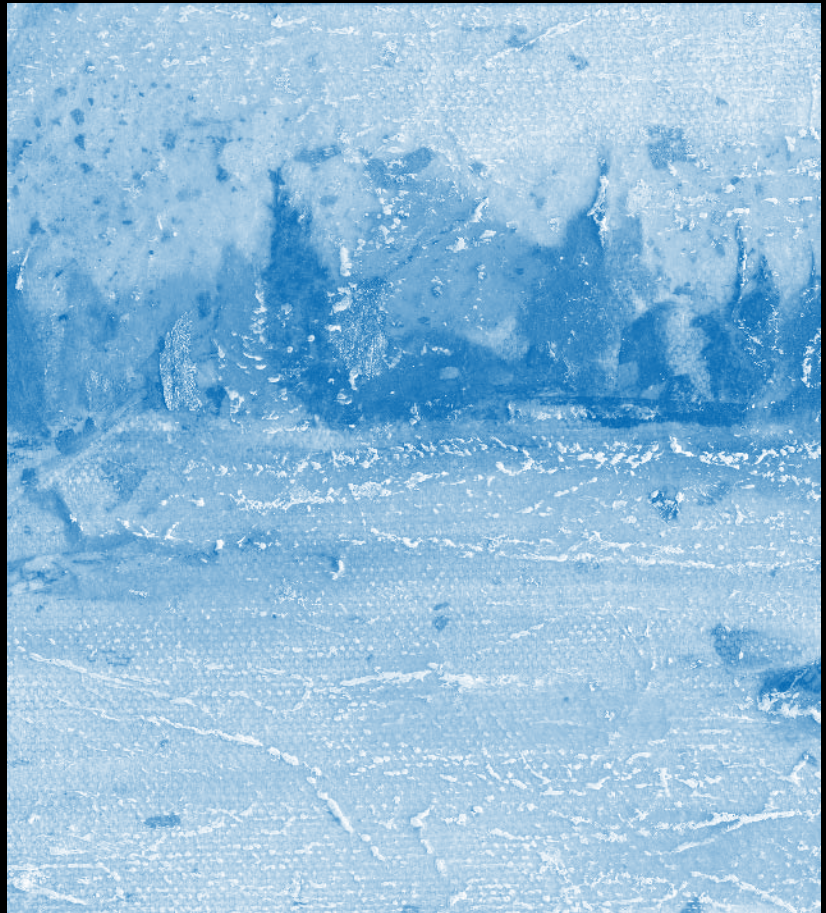
Drive the paddle deep.

The Scouting Stop—Mapping Assessment Tasks

Do not run anything you cannot see.

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	<i>Some call it "summative."</i>	
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	<i>We came to have a conversation.</i>	
	Minor Eddy	
	<i>It was a planned interruption.</i>	
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The Narrows—Part 2: Creating Assessment Tools

three purposes of learning assessment—three types of assessment tools

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THE NARROWS—PART 2: CREATING ASSESSMENT TOOLS

“There is nothing softer and weaker than water and yet there is nothing better for attacking hard and strong things.”

—Tao Te Ching



To psychometricians (test technicians) a good assessment tool (test) is one that meets clearly defined validity, reliability and efficiency standards, established by the measurement community (American Psychological Association). But for the classroom instructor, the creation of quality criteria is not so much a technical issue as a learning issue. Good criteria is criteria that assists the students, provides data for making decisions about advancing the student and making decisions about adjusting learning experiences. While issues of validity and reliability are important for criterion tools that will find large-scale use, most instructors will judge classroom assessment tools by the degree to which they identify student learning strengths and weaknesses and ultimately improve learning.

Story: I arrived late in the day at a county campground on Oregon’s Umpqua river

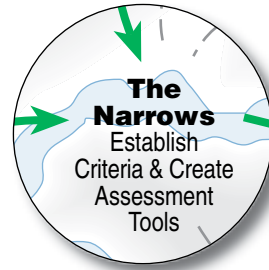
east of the city of Roseburg. For me it was just a convenient, beautiful spot to sleep after helping a friend clean a family plot in a pioneer cemetery near there. The cemetery cleanup was an annual ritual for her, and I had come to appreciate the experience with her.

The rural park was unusually crowded with some very large groups. The group next to us consisted of more than twenty people all huddled around tables in what I could only describe as a mess hall under a canopy. They were outfitted with everything you could imagine and must have planned to stay awhile. But what I noticed most were the giant truck inner tubes all tied together around a central tree. I had arrived after they got off the river and therefore had no idea what kind of formation they created with those tubes. My curiosity got the best of me so I paid them a visit.

I learned they were also on an annual pilgrimage—same time and place every year—inner tubing a two-mile section of the river, many times each day for an entire week. Since the tubes were all roped together I asked the leader, “When you float the river do you keep the tubes tied together?” His reply was, “You don’t want to be stupid!” Of course, that reply made me feel real stupid and I returned shyly to my camper. I went to bed still wondering what they looked like on the river.

We are all curious about a lot of things. Some of us ask and some of us don’t. Some people seem to take pleasure in knowing what others don’t know. Sometimes it is meant to be a guessing game. *It’s no different in the classroom.* At times, students feel stupid simply because they have to guess at what is important—guess what might be on a test—guess what it is that the instructor really wants. *In a learning-centered, outcomes-based curriculum there is no guessing.* Effective assessment tools paint the picture—a picture of “what’s good.” A qualitative assessment tool is powerful, yet comforting, because it shows where we hope to go—in the same way that the directionality of moving water is powerful, yet creates a peace.

Based on our discussion of “What’s Good?” in Part 5, in this section we focus on different kinds of assessment tools for the three different purposes of learning assessment: *assess to assist, assess to advance and assess to adjust.*



It is important to keep in mind that this is a primer—“a small introductory book” (Webster)—not a graduate textbook. We have chosen carefully, and delimited our discussion to what we believe are the essentials for every college instructor. While quality assessment tools take on many different forms and styles, we have tried to reduce confusion by limiting our descriptions to three primary tools:

1. The Checklist
2. The Scoring Guide
3. The Rubric

We will make a strong point of distinguishing scoring guides from rubrics (which serve different purposes) in a way that brings clarity to their purpose, but may not reflect textbook definitions—because we are looking for what really works.

We make no claim other than to construct tools as key markers that any instructor can use to create a flow of evidence.

“I focus on a rock jutting up to the surface just off the left shore... this rock will serve as one of my key markers in finding my way through this run.”

—From *What the River Says*



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