

Reshaping students' understanding of assessment

Have you ever heard the following comments from students?

- Student A: Memorisation is the only way to get high marks!
- Student B: Every time the examination papers are returned to us, I care most about the mark in the top right-hand corner. If my mark is low, my mind will go blank and my ears will refuse to listen.
- Student C: All you need to do is correction. Correction means writing down the "model answers" from teachers!
- Student D: A new question type appeared on the last test. It seems that I have to give up the marks allocated to this type of question.

A Life and Society (Secondary 1-3) teacher shares how he and his colleagues use the test or examination results in what he calls "redrawing the starting line" to help improve students' understanding.

"Some students rely too much on the model answers from teachers. These students believe that as long as they can memorise everything given by the teacher, they will be able to perform well in the examination. These students feel disoriented when they are confronted with new question words."

"This problem is not unique to Life and Society (Secondary 1-3). Students' learning habits must change in a fundamental way for them to be more interested and to improve in learning. To change students' perceptions, the assessment design must be revised. In designing the examination paper, we deliberately divide the questions into several types: memorisation (Level 1), application (Level 2), higher-order thinking (Level 3) and current issues. Apart from the overall mark, students will also receive marks of each type of question. This helps identify students' strengths and weaknesses and enables teachers to provide remedial support to students based on their performance. When the teacher returns the test/examination papers to the students, they are given time to write reflections on the areas in which they have improved and those that need attention. Students are prompted to review their own performance in light of their learning attitudes, learning methods and daily habits."

“Students now care not only about the total marks but also their strengths and weaknesses and how to learn better. Equipped with the ability to reflect on their own learning, students are inclined to ask higher-order questions about learning, such as “Why do I have to learn this?” and “What is the connection between this and other subjects?”

If you are interested in assessment, read also Examples 37-42.