EMPOWER YOUR TEACHING
AND YOUR STUDENTS’ LEARNING

Using Apperson Scanners with DataLink Connect
Software can empower your teaching!

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Assessment-Powered Teaching
DROWNING IN DATA
Teachers are spending more time than ever before testing students and schools are absolutely drowning in test data. Yet, many schools use test results merely to select and sort students and conform to NCLB requirements. Many teachers view testing as a mandate that robs them and their students of valuable instructional time. However, when test data is analyzed and used to inform teaching and monitor student progress, then testing brings focus to curriculum, providing teachers with strategic information to inform teaching and get students energized about learning.

WHY ANALYZING TEST DATA IS IMPORTANT

Testing alone does nothing to improve teaching or learning. If all schools do is test and never actually use the test results to improve curriculum, instruction and student learning, then testing does rob teachers of valuable instructional time and is a waste. However, when test results are analyzed and used to inform teaching and monitor student progress, then testing brings focus to curriculum and provides teachers with valuable information.

Too often we, as teachers, don’t use the results of our classroom tests. We tend to put grades in our gradebooks and move on. This practice often creates a lose-lose situation because we may be asking our students to learn things they don’t have the background for learning, and we become frustrated because our teaching is less effective. However, when we align our curriculum and classroom tests to standards and then analyze and use the test results to inform our teaching and monitor our students’ progress test results become a valuable tool. We can then use that tool to inform our instruction and motivate our students to take the next steps needed to reach specific goals and standards.

HOW DATALINK CONNECT REPORTS CAN INFORM TEACHING AND IMPROVE LEARNING

Apperson data-enabled scanners scan teacher made tests right into their exclusive DataLink Connect software which produces a variety of teacher-friendly reports. These reports provide teachers with valuable information about what students know and what they don’t know. These scanners can be placed in a classroom so that teachers and students can have analyzed data minutes after students complete a test or quiz, or the scanners can be placed in a teacher workroom or a department office.
The district where I was Assistant Superintendent had an Assessment Center in each school. We were able to analyze multiple choice tests as well as rubric graded performance assessments, such as essays or speeches, and have reports back to teachers within twenty-four hours. The teachers loved it. They truly became hungry for data because they could see the results of their teaching and their student’s learning. They knew exactly what their students knew and what they didn’t know and became very strategic in what they retaught.

Apperson’s Datalink Connect software provides teachers with a number of very useful test analysis reports. For example,

- **The Class Proficiency Report** shows teachers how many students are considered proficient on each standard tested. The example to the right shows a math test where the standards tested are Functions and Numbers. The class average on the test is 83%, but the report shows that only 80% of the students meet the expectations for the number standard. Based on this report, a teacher can easily see that some students need more instruction on numbers. This information creates a teachable moment and the opportunity to strategically reteach an important piece of the curriculum, enabling more students to meet or exceed the standards.

- **The Student Proficiency Report** shows how an individual student performed on specific standards of a classroom test. The example to the right shows a student with an overall average of 87% on a classroom test.

While this student would normally receive a B, this student only achieved a 71% on the algebraic properties questions. This report shows the student their strengths and weaknesses and gives specific next steps for improvement. This report is a good example of how using specific test data can help a B student become an A student.
The item analysis report shows the questions and the percentage of all answers selected for each question. Reports can be run for an individual student, a class or several classes that have taken the same test. It’s useful to teachers because it identifies confusing questions as well as areas of misunderstanding for students. Think about it. When 50% of the class thinks A is the correct answer and 50% thinks B is the correct answer, something has taken place to confuse students. It may be a poorly worded question or confusing information in the text. In either case, it’s well worth a teacher’s time to take a minute and go back and clarify with students which answer is correct and why.

When the scanners and software that produce these reports are placed in a classroom, teachers and students have analyzed data reports minutes after students complete a test or quiz. Strategic re-teaching can begin immediately and students learn the next steps they need to take to reach learning targets and standards.

FOUR WAYS TEACHERS CAN USE DATALINK CONNECT TEST ANALYSIS REPORTS TO INFORM TEACHING AND IMPROVE STUDENTS’ LEARNING

Testing alone does nothing to improve learning, but using analyzed test results dramatically increases our power to inform our teaching and improve our students’ learning. Teachers can use test results in at least four ways to improve learning.

1. Test results can help teachers guide their instruction. I encourage teachers to think about three questions: What do you want your students to know? How will you know if they know it? And what will you do when they don’t know it?

Test results tell teachers what their students know and don’t know, but, only if they take the time to look at and analyze the test results and reteach what students don’t know—rather than just moving through the curriculum. The reports described above let teachers know if it’s time to move on or if more information or practice is needed by students.
2. The second way to use test results is to monitor students’ learning of specific state or common core standards. Students may be doing well on five of six standards---and need help in just one area. Specific weaknesses in an individual student or a class can be exposed through analysis of test results. If teachers look at analyzed test results, they can reteach/remediate a specific weakness before moving on.

3. The third way to use analyzed test results is to close achievement gaps. Often subgroup weaknesses are hidden in overall class averages, but when teachers disaggregate test data by subgroup, they can easily see if certain subgroups need help.

In Assessment-Powered Teaching, pp. 90-91, there’s an example of a high school U.S. History class that is expected to know the state standard of Interpreting Documents. When you look at the non-disaggregated data, 89% of the class meets this standard, but when the data is disaggregated, we see that only 61% of Black-non-Hispanics meet this standard. This is an achievement gap that can easily be remedied by a short target lesson on strategies to identify types of historical evidence found in historical documents. The teacher just needs to be aware of the gap and strategically reteach.

4. The fourth way to use test results is to engage students in their own learning. The difference between good students and weak students is that good students see a pathway to success. Weaker students need more help in understanding what they need to do to improve. Test results can specify what a student is good at and what they need to work on. When students see specific data rather than just a grade, they can see next steps for improvement and feel motivated to take them. The most helpful element in helping students to learn is specific feedback. When students receive feedback, they tend to think, “I can do this.”

Teachers have always given tests. Now we have test analysis tools that dramatically increase our capacity to monitor learning and increase students’ learning trajectories. By using test analysis, we empower our teaching and our students’ learning.
INTRODUCTION TO NANCY SINDELAR

I work with schools and teachers to use test results to improve teaching and learning and nurture successful teacher teams and PLCs to reach measurable goals they, themselves, set. These teams align their local curriculum and classroom assessments with state or common core standards and then use analyzed test data to implement a variety of interventions to make certain all students meet or exceed standards and achieve their full potential. Using this process, I helped a culturally and economically diverse high school in southern Illinois move from the state’s academic watch list to being the most improved school in the state, based on state test scores.

My career path has proceeded from teacher, to department chair, to dean of instruction, to director of educational programs, to assistant superintendent for curriculum, instruction and assessment, to a national consultant and university professor. This journey has allowed me to understand the challenges and responsibilities of each of these positions and their impact on instruction. I’m sensitive to teachers’ attitudes toward testing and their needs for using test results effectively in the classroom and have created practical, cost-effective workshops that are based on professional experience as well as research.

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