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I wonder how teachers can help parents feel confident in the new forms of assessment we see today?

Deslandes, R. & Rivard, M.C. (2013). A Pilot Study Aiming to Promote Parents' Understanding of Learning Assessments at the Elementary Level. *School Community Journal*, 23(2), 9-32.

People for Education. (2018, Jan. 19). *PM1 – Getting away from A's – Iram Khan and Shelley Brett* [Video]. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/m4oJKaeY6d8>

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What I knew

When I entered into this inquiry project I did not know a lot about how assessment has changed in our BC Elementary School classrooms. I had heard that change had taken place and I had heard that letter and numerical grades were being phased out. This is significant background in relation to the five questions I asked myself:

1. I wonder how teachers respond to parents who feel that it is unfair that other children are being assessed differently from their own?
2. I wonder how teachers deal with parents when student "success" looks different for different students?
3. I wonder how teachers can help parents feel confident in the new forms of assessment we see today?
4. I wonder how teachers assess project-based/place-based learning?
5. I wonder if assessment looks different in First Nations Independent schools?

Why am I writing this paper

I landed on the question of "I wonder how teachers can help parents feel confident in the new forms of assessment we see today?" It is important to me that parents feel confident in how their child is being assessed in my classroom and that parents feel like they have an active role in their child's learning. If parents are anxious and questioning the new forms of assessment and communication of that assessment, then the relationship between teacher and parent will always be one of trying to prove why the assessment is working/beneficial (teacher) or why it is not honouring the work of the student (parent). I entered into research with this question, in part, because I am anticipating that there is significant anxiety and mistrust amongst parents when it comes to the new forms of assessment and the phasing out of numerical and letter grades.

The search

I have read a lot and searched even more! I changed my keywords and used search platforms from the TRU library to Google. Interestingly enough, a lot of the first results that came up in searches had to do with mental health in adolescence (while not a topic directly connected to assessment, an important topic today nevertheless). I read scholarly and blog articles written by teachers, principals, and researchers. I read news media reports covering the change in different BC school districts that expressed both the excitement in the changes

and anxiety. There were moments in my research when I thought about going back to change my chosen question in hopes that I might select a question that would give me a more direct and clear answer.

What I learned

Within my I-Search, I learned a lot about the new forms assessment in the BC Curriculum, information that I had not yet discovered in the same way in my education training to date. Through my search, I was unable to find the information directly about building confidence in parents when it comes to communicating the new forms of assessment. A number of the pieces I read surprised me when they talked about how much parents appreciated the depth of feedback being shared about their child's learning. The study completed by Deslandes and Rivard (2013) gathered groups of parents into workshops that walked them through both the learning and assessment forms that take place in their child's classroom. The outcomes of that study have encouraged me to consider inviting parents to engage in something similar at the beginning of the school year so they can experience first hand how learning is observed and reflected on both by the teacher and the learner. Parents will then be able to see the connection between teaching and learning in the classroom and the feedback that is being shared through assessment communications.

Through the School District 8 handout, I learned about the depth of communication that is expected to be shared with parents on both a scheduled and ongoing basis. This handout also expanded the picture of the role and participation of parents in the competency-driven curriculum. While reading through the material I started to wonder how teachers could adequately and consistently observe and communicate the depth of student learning, for a whole class, through the new ways of assessing and reporting. As a Teacher Candidate not having put this into practice yet, it seems like a significant amount of information to find an efficient way to organize and effectively communicate.

The information shared in the presentation by principals Irma Khan and Shelley Brett outlined the disadvantages to letter grades and how "communicating student learning" honours the students learning and allows for the contribution of both students and parents. They shared firsthand experiences of how providing evidence of learning is equipping families with a complete look at the education their child is engaging in. These examples showed the interactions between teacher, student, and parent and how the teacher shared student reflections and observations on their learning. These examples helped my understanding of how the shift between reporting students' grades to communicating student learning throughout the year looks in practice. From the information, experiences, and examples shared by Irma and Shelley, I began to understand how the parents of these students in these schools are engaging and appreciating this new form of reporting. I can also see how the relationships between teacher and student and teacher and parent can shift to a more positive, supportive, and collaborative relationship when the reporting of grades in the traditional sense is removed from the picture.

After completing my I-Search, I continued to wonder. I wonder what information and orientation can be shared with parents who are arriving into a BC school where new forms of assessment are taking place, specifically when they come from another province where traditional forms continue to take place? I wonder how the transition from the new form of assessment back into the traditional form of assessment (letter/numerical grades) in grade 10 will be handled and how students will be supported? I wonder if the voices of concerned or confused parents within this new form of assessment have been captured; are there more voices that need to be heard so we can develop the supports for parents that would be most helpful?