

Linking Faith Formation and Assessment

What do you remember about the type of assessments your teachers used, especially in a religion class? How will your students answer that question about you one day? Testing, evaluation, and assessment can cause anxiety for teacher and student alike. Assessment can be misunderstood and utilized in ways that are not beneficial, especially in a religion program. Indeed, how can you measure faith development?

In assessment you gather data related to knowledge, skills, and attitudes. The analysis of the data may lead you to change your teaching. You may need to adjust your pacing, instructional delivery, and activities to meet the faith needs of your students. In order to help children recognize their strengths, assessment must be an on-going process and an integral part of teaching.

Assessment provides a way of comparing how well students have met the goals and objectives of the religion curriculum. Together, the teacher and student interact with a variety of formal and informal tools that demonstrate what has been learned and celebrated within the classroom community of faith. These tools should build on prior knowledge and lead the student through a process of critical thinking. By using different forms of assessment, students move from basic recall to comprehension, to application of faith concepts, and finally to the ability to analyze how faith makes a difference in their lives and in the lives of others.

Multiple forms of assessment also can reflect and utilize the different intelligences of your students. If your approach to assessment reflects the multiple ways that children learn, you will encourage them to take ownership both of their learning and of their faith journey. This is a key factor that defines us as teachers in Catholic schools.

Assessments define learning targets or expectations for students, document student progress, identify the next steps in instruction for the teacher, and promote a student's participation in self-assessment and goal setting. Assessment can then be understood as:

- a measure of the knowledge acquired
- part of all teaching and learning
- an on-going process
- moving children through different levels of thinking
- leading children to apply knowledge in daily life
- an interactive process between the teacher and learner
- leading to growth in knowledge and understanding

The use of multiple assessments in religion provides accountability for our children's growth in the knowledge of their faith and better reflects both their cognitive and affective development. As students learn more about their faith, they begin to understand the difference faith makes in their lives, and deepen their own relationship with God.

When used together in a deliberate assessment system, formal and informal tools will provide meaningful and useful information to teachers, parents, students and administrators. Multiple forms of assessment can include:

- Rubrics—a set of specific criteria for scoring student work with descriptions of varying levels of achievement and understanding
- Teacher Observation and Checklists—a well-defined checklist with observation. For example, this might include your observation of the student’s class participation, response to questions, and contribution to cooperative learning activities.
- Anecdotal Records—short, factual narrative descriptions of student behaviors and skills over time that provide insights about student learning patterns
- Portfolios—a collection of student work over time that demonstrates an understanding of the concepts and the many dimensions of the student’s learning
- Home Inventories—a survey or open-ended questions completed by parents describing behaviors and skills that children demonstrate in the home setting
- Diagnostic Assessments—an assessment that identifies a range of strengths and

weaknesses in the child, for example, in learning styles

- Standardized tests—tests typically administered in groups that provide normative and scaled data that can be aggregated as one part of the learning dimension of the student; provide data for program planning and development

Quality formal and informal assessments give teachers valuable and individualized information about children’s skills and knowledge. Assessments lead the teachers to select quality activities and instruction and provide information to help strengthen programs and hold educators accountable. Most of all, developmentally appropriate assessments benefit students by insuring that the educational experience and faith journey springs from a solid foundation of knowledge and skills.

After each lesson, each chapter, and each unit, ask yourself:

1. What have I learned about my students?
2. What do they now know about themselves as learners and people of faith?
3. How have we grown in faith together?

By linking faith formation and assessment, you will be helping your students grow in faith. Assessment helps them grow in

knowledge and understanding of faith concepts while providing an opportunity to apply what they have learned to their own lives. As you help them reflect on their own growth, you hold open for them the possibility of deeper conversion. Incorporating a holistic approach to assessment will help your students know, celebrate, and live their faith more deeply as children of God. The added gift is that your observation of their faith journeys will serve to enrich your own faith as well.

Note: *Faith First Legacy Edition* contains multiple assessment features throughout each chapter as well as at the end of each unit. For additional information and support on assessment, see the *Assessment Tools* booklets provided for each grade level.

FOR REFLECTION

- *How might you link assessment and faith formation deliberately and systematically in your classes? How can you implement one or two of those ideas?*
- *Ask yourself the following question at the beginning of the school year, at the beginning of the second semester, and at the end of the school year: How have my students and I grown in faith together?*