

Designing Effective Projects: Assessing Projects Assessing an Elementary Project

An Elementary Assessment Plan

Project Background

An elementary school teacher is beginning a unit on rainforests. As part of the study of ecosystems in the third grade, students are expected to know examples of diverse life forms in different environments. To address this standard, the teacher designs a project, keeping assessment in mind from the beginning. Using books and online resources, students research a particular animal from the rainforest. They collect information explaining the animal's place in the food chain, its survival adaptations, its place in the rainforest layers, and any other interesting facts. They create rainforest animal puppets and a dialogue that includes the information they researched. Students present a puppet show to share what they learned. After the performance, their puppets are displayed on a classroom bulletin board depicting a rainforest ecosystem.

Assessment Plan

To begin, the teacher and the students generate a rubric to outline project requirements and expectations. The teacher explains the project requirements and then asks the students prompting questions such as: *What should a project that meets expectations look like? How will the project show what you know?* These questions direct students to think about expectations and outcomes. Once a description of a project that meets expectations is outlined, the students and the teacher modify the language to describe projects that would be below expectations and ones that are above expectations. The responses are compiled by the teacher and a copy of the rubric is given to each student to refer to throughout the project. The teacher reinforces expectations by modeling exemplary work with student examples. At this point, students have an opportunity to ask questions and the teacher has a chance to check for understanding before they begin.

With the rubric in place, students are aware of project expectations and objectives and are given responsibility for their quality of work. As they work on tasks to complete the project, they are guided by the use of their rubrics. The rubric assures the teacher that students are aware of what they need to do. At the same time, the teacher is concerned that there are many tasks for them to complete, and that these young students may need help prioritizing and managing their time. To assist in this challenge, the teacher has students organize their time with checklists and timelines, and keeps them accountable by meeting with a few students each day for short check-up conferences. In addition, at the end of every day, as they complete project time, students fill out short self-evaluations that prompt them to reflect on their work for the day. This process not only keeps students in check but also recognizes their daily efforts.

By embedding assessment checkpoints throughout the unit, the teacher can make informed decisions. At pivotal points, student learning of the intended objectives and engagement in higher-level thinking can be assessed. If the teacher does not feel that these processes are taking place, then there is an opportunity to address these issues at the most crucial times.

When the performance task is completed, students have an opportunity to share what they have learned. The unit culminates with a test, covering objectives and specific areas of learning. The students' final product is then assessed with the class created rubric. Progress has been evaluated along the way with timelines, checklists, and anecdotal notes from conferences. Using this structure of on-going assessment, both teacher and student can feel confident that they have reached their objectives.