
Triangulating Data on Student Learning

Adapted from:

Parker Boudett, K., City, E.A., Murnane, R.J. (Eds.). (2005). *Data wise: A step-by-step guide to using assessment results to improve teaching and learning*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Using multiple sources of data when documenting students' learning is an effective way of validating initial analyses of a single piece of data.

In looking for patterns and inconsistencies in students' learning, it's useful to draw on information gained through different sources and types of assessment over time.

Multiple sources of data on students' learning

1. Include opportunities for informal assessment, students' self-reports of learning, and even unsolicited data from placement supervisors or employers.

Students' performance in the classroom can become a data point if teachers adopt a habit of keeping session logs to record ways that students respond to instruction in different learning situations. Data gained through student focus groups or interviews may also provide an alternative perspective on how and what students are learning. Placement supervisors and employers are likely to be able to comment on integrated, authentic, practical learning.

2. Use more than one type of assessment when analyzing data

When you know what it is that you're looking for in students' learning, the more likely you are to want to gather data from different sources to bolster your claims about what they've learned. Looking at multiple sources of data on students' learning is analogous to taking multiple snapshots of a single event – it provides a more complete picture of reality. Using data from multiple assessment sources enables teachers to more accurately determine students' strengths and identify areas for improvement

3. Value all assessments not just major events

Any assessment activity that was worth having your students do is worth using as a data point.

4. Use the data gained from assessment to answer questions about authentic learning

Typically, authentic learning is described as learning that mimics the real-life knowledge and skills that are required in industry. Just as typically, questions about complex learning are unlikely to be fully answered using just one piece of data.

5. Look at Data Across Time Intervals

- a. When looking at data on students' learning over time, look for patterns and changes in performance and achievement in relation to the demands of the curriculum.