



## Thoughts on Kagan Structures and Assessment

By Gavin Clowes

What are Structures? Simply put, structures are instructional strategies. They describe how students are to interact with the teacher, with the content, and with each other. Kagan Cooperative Learning is not only a powerful set of instructional strategies it provides an ideal context for teachers to easily perform authentic, representative assessment. We can see without difficulty what the students can do and what they can't do. The students find out what they know and take the next step forward.

Here are five ways Kagan Structures helped me as a class teacher to improve my assessment of students:

1. Using a simple structure such as RallyRobin and walking around as students respond, I can listen in to a representative sample of the class rather than just hearing from the high achievers. Contrast me asking a 'Whole-Class Question' such as, "Who in the class can name a prime number" and then waiting for students to raise their hands and calling on one of those students to answer with, "turn to your partner and RallyRobin prime numbers." In the Whole-Class situation it can become a conversation between me, the teacher and a few high achievers; often I do not know what the lows (who don't raise hands) know. This is inauthentic assessment.
2. Authentic assessment leads me to monitor and adjust my lesson and to differentiate instruction if students are not achieving well. RallyRobin has all my students produce multiple answers to a question rather than seek the one correct answer I 'the teacher' was thinking of. (This is a component of any good higher-level thinking skills curriculum.) RallyRobin creates greater engagement among my students because all students participate, rather than a few high achievers. In the same amount of time two or three students have been called on to share an answer each, I can have every student in my class share several answers so engagement and retention are far greater. I can assess the ability of students to respond to mediation/coaching. As students give each other corrective feedback, some "get it" right away and others do not. Knowing how responsive students are to different types of corrective feedback/coaching helps me to adapt my teaching. I therefore monitor in order to adjust. Monitoring the student's response to correction in the moment is formative assessment which is far more useful than simple summative assessment.
3. While students work together using a structure like Sage-N-Scribe they are verbalising their thinking out loud, as the teacher I can clearly hear and see students' thoughts, ideas and even misconceptions. What usually occurs between the ears of the student is now outside the student's head and is easy for me to assess much better than just marking performance on worksheets. The ability to communicate thinking is becoming more and more important as we move toward greater interdependence/teamwork in the workplace, the more complex technically we become as a society the more important this becomes.
4. Once students have learned to work as teams, I am free to consult with teams or individuals who need help. I can organise 'pull-out' groups for individuals with similar learning blocks so they may

receive special tutoring as a group. In this way, cooperative learning facilitates differentiated instruction.

5. Because students are 'teaching' each other, I get the opportunity to move from "sage on the stage" to "guide on the side". I have much more time to interact with students in small teams or on a one-to-one increasing formative assessment. During this one-to-one interaction, I can carry out "deep level" assessment and potentially discover the block a particular student needs to overcome. I get to learn 'what and **how** they are learning.' I can ask questions to focus individuals or teams on their task "What is your next step?" "How do you plan to?" "Who will...?"

With the 'Revised New Framework' for APP the Kagan Cooperative Learning approach promotes the facilitatory role of teachers during structured group work, it allows the teacher to focus on the 'day-to-day assessment' aspect of the of the APP process, where interactions between learners and between learners and their teachers are critical in informing the future Assessment for Learning Strategy. I believe that in this role teachers will be afforded more time to effectively focus on assessing and aligning pupils' achievements against national standards.

#### References:

Kagan, S. "Group Grades Miss the Mark." Educational Leadership. 1995, 52(8): 68-71

Kagan, S.& Kagan, M. ' Kagan Cooperative Learning'. San Clemente, CA: Kagan Publishing, 2009.