MASTERING ASSESSMENT: A SELF-SERVICE PROGRAM FOR EDUCATORS

Foreseen Diversity

The 15 booklets that make up Mastering Assessment: A Self-Service Program for Educators (hereafter referred to as MA) are intended to be the grist for a wide variety of professional development programs focused on educational assessment. Each of the MA booklets was deliberately written to permit a one-sitting or two-sittings reading by busy educators. The resultant brevity of the MA booklets, coupled with their being provided as separate documents, is intended to provide users of the MA system with considerable latitude in determining how best to use the booklets.

There is no one best way to employ the system’s 15 booklets. On the contrary, professional development programs work best when they mesh with the personal preferences of the educators who are taking part in those programs. Here are some suggestions as to the many ways the MA booklets might be incorporated into an effective school-level or district-level professional development program dealing with educational assessment.

Selecting the Appropriate Booklets

Mastering Assessment relies on a color-coding scheme so that users can select suitable booklets. The MA container presents the titles of all 15 booklets along with a distinctive color-code designation for each booklet. In addition, at the beginning of each booklet, the key understandings the booklet addresses are listed. Thus, an educator can readily determine a booklet’s appropriateness based on its title and its set of intended understandings.

Two Considerations: User Numbers and Usage Structure

Two key usage variables are (1) the number of educators who are taking part in the MA-related professional development program and (2) the degree to which the program is structured. To illustrate, one of the easiest ways to use the MA booklets is for a school’s principal simply to place the materials in the teachers’ lounge, then encourage the staff—as individuals—to select and
return the booklets. At a more structured level, it would be possible for a school’s professional development committee to devise a series of MA-related colloquies for the entire staff over the course of a school year—with individual sessions being led by a small group of teachers and/or administrators who have previously read the materials and are willing to take a leadership role in the discussion of a given MA booklet’s topic.

**Illustrative Options**

Clearly, numerous variations are possible in the nature of an MA-related professional development program. Here are several illustrations.

*Pluck-and-Peruse.* At the least structured level, and leaving involvement up to a school’s educators on a volitional basis, the school’s staff could be made aware of the MA booklets’ availability and encouraged to select one or more booklets to peruse. (Because most dictionaries define *peruse* in a contradictory manner—that is, both as a systematic as well as a slapdash sort of reading—the Pluck-and-Peruse option seems to exemplify MA’s flagrant flexibility.)

*Learning Communities.* Another approach to MA usage would be to encourage a school’s staff to voluntarily identify small groups who would constitute the kind of extended-duration learning communities that have proved so successful recently in many professional development settings. As always, the particulars of any such learning-community approach would need to be thoughtfully determined in relation to the preferences of the individuals involved. For example, participants in a particular school’s learning community might decide to give attention, over the course of an academic year, to a subset of MA booklets substantially different from the MA booklets focused on by another school’s learning community.

*Total Staff.* A final version of an assessment-related professional development program would take place when an entire school’s staff set out to enhance its collective assessment literacy by utilizing certain (or perhaps all) of the MA booklets. As usual, this sort of total-staff approach to professional development would need to be structured with as much or as little detail as is considered appropriate by those who are planning the program.

The typical target audience for an assessment-related professional development program consists of teachers and school administrators. However, increasing numbers of educators are now realizing that many other individuals
have an important stake in the way today’s educational tests are being used. Thus, once the participants in an MA-based professional development program have attained a reasonable degree of assessment literacy, they may wish to transmit a set of fundamental understandings about educational testing to parents, citizens in general, and—because students’ futures are so influenced by test scores—to students themselves.

As Always, Motivation Wins

In any educational experience, whether it involves kindergartners or seasoned educators, a motivated learner is far more likely to learn than an unmotivated learner. Accordingly, one critical step in devising a sensible MA professional development program is to make sure participants recognize that, for the foreseeable future, educators’ effectiveness will be dominantly determined by students’ scores on tests. In this context, then, educators’ increased understanding of measurement-related matters is imperative if for no other reason than professional survival. Early and continuing attention to educators’ motivation will increase the likelihood of success with any variant of MA usage. This is because, at bottom, teachers who know more about educational assessment, because of a successful MA-based program, will be able to provide their students with a superior education.