



Use Assessment: Help Your Students Connect God's World and Word

Part 2 of a 4-Part Series

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What can you do to get started using this kit?

- Look at the session guides, noting the title and goal of each session.
- Read "Session 1: How effectively are you using assessment to help your students connect God's world and Word?" (page 6) and "Reading 1: Reflect on assessment" (page 7).
- Read through the facilitator guides, especially "Let's help each of our students connect God's world and Word in each subject" (page 2) and "Frequently asked questions" (page 4).

Use assessment

Assessment helps your students learn. Assessment can also help your students connect God's world and Word.

These 7 sessions will help you...

1. Evaluate and improve your use of assessment to help your students connect God's world and Word.
2. Analyze and explain how assessment can help your students connect God's world and Word.
3. Identify and explain what types of assessment can help your students connect God's world and Word.
4. Make one assessment even better.
5. Prepare your students for and give an assessment that requires your students to connect God's world and Word.
6. Use your assessment data to help your students connect God's world and Word.
7. Increase your commitment to using assessment to help your students connect God's world and Word.

I would enjoy learning about how you are using assessment to help your students connect God's world and Word. Please email me at [<learnmore@closethegapnow.org>](mailto:learnmore@closethegapnow.org).

—Michael B. Essenburg



Michael

I'm passionate about helping students connect God's world and Word.

Key ways to do this include targeting connections, using assessments, using questions, and meeting student learning needs.

Let's help each of our students connect God's world and Word in each subject

We want our students to connect God's world and Word. When 5th graders study health, we're excited to see them write things like, "The first step in being healthy is to have a good relationship with God." And when 10th graders study racism as portrayed in *Night* (a Holocaust memoir), we feel good to see them write things like, "I have no right to choose whether I should help or not; the day I chose to follow my consistent and loving God, I threw away the option of apathy."

What's our goal? To have each of our students proficiently connect God's world and Word in each subject.

What helps teachers achieve this goal? Having their learning needs met, for example:

1. Getting support, encouragement, and accountability.
2. Experiencing engaging instruction.
3. Having time to reflect on the importance of helping students make connections and on how to help students make connections.
4. Having concrete examples of how students are connecting God's world and Word. And having concrete examples of how other teachers help their students connect God's world and Word.
5. Having repeated opportunities to apply their learning.

These materials (part of a 4-part series) are designed to help teachers achieve the goal of having each student connect God's world and Word in each subject. In each session (suggested length of 60 minutes), teachers will:

1. Support each other as they report on progress they've made on their action steps.
2. Read about and discuss a key question like "What do you want your students to learn?"
3. Commit to action steps they will take before the next session in order to help students connect God's world and Word.
4. Pray for each other.

What helps administrators achieve this goal? Being able to provide professional development that results in each teacher helping each student to connect God's world and Word. And being able to provide professional development that is cost-effective, easy to set up, easy to facilitate, and aligned with accreditation standards.

These materials are designed to help administrators achieve the goal of having each student connect God's world and Word in each subject. To use these materials, no outside expert needs to be called in. Instead, an administrator or a classroom teacher can serve as facilitator. To use these materials, no extensive preparation is required—the facilitator can just review the materials, make copies of the session guide and reading, and use the guide to help participants move through the session. And to use these materials, no big blocks of time have to be set aside. Instead, smaller blocks of time (say, 60 minutes) can be scheduled over several weeks.

Take action: Help each student proficiently connect God's world and Word. You can do this by reviewing the materials, using the assessment in Session 1 to determine which sessions to include, finding a facilitator, developing a schedule, and inviting teachers to participate.

What makes a good facilitator good?

A good facilitator facilitates from his heart, from beliefs about growth:

1. *God is growing His people, and the Holy Spirit is at work in each believer.* God is already at work in the lives of each of His people. While God may use me to help a person grow, it's God who is actually growing each of His people. As a facilitator, I encourage each person to listen to God.
2. *People want to grow and are empowered to grow by those who believe in them.* You and I both want to grow. And people who believe in us empower us to grow. I know this. I've experienced it in my own life. You have, too. When people believe in me, I can do more. As a facilitator, I believe in people. So, I listen (instead of talking), ask questions (instead of advising), and encourage (instead of critiquing). Remember, Barnabas believed in Paul.
3. *Growing is more about motivation than information.* We all know good things that would help us grow. We know we should do these good things—but we don't. Simply put, knowing doesn't equal doing. As a facilitator, I empower people to focus on good things they want to work on.
4. *People grow as they take responsibility by defining, committing to, and achieving goals.* So as a facilitator, I don't take the responsibility for defining goals; instead, I empower people to define their goals. I don't take the responsibility for committing to goals; instead, I empower people to commit to their goals. I don't take the responsibility for achieving the goals; instead, I empower people to achieve their goals. Make sense?

Based on these beliefs, a good facilitator uses key skills to help others grow:

1. *A good facilitator listens* (instead of talking). He gives his full attention to what others are saying, looks interested, sounds interested, and targets understanding (not judging). He listens a minimum of 80% of the time.
2. *A good facilitator inquires to provoke reflection* (instead of advising). He asks questions ("What helps students make connections?"), makes inviting statements ("Tell me more about...."), and recognizes that effective inquiry means that others talk at least 80% of the time.
3. *A good facilitator focuses others* on achieving the session goal and on determining and achieving their own action steps (instead of suggesting action steps).
4. *A good facilitator encourages others* (instead of critiquing). He does this by asking for clarification ("What do you mean by...?"), by giving affirmation, and by restating things ("So, you're saying....").

Finally, a good facilitator prepares. Before each session, he makes sure he understands the significance of the session title and the goal, familiarizes himself with the session content, determines the length of the session (I suggest 60 minutes), makes photocopies and room arrangements, and develops a facilitation plan (see page 4).

So, what makes a good facilitator good? A good facilitator facilitates from his heart, uses key skills, and prepares. Why? In order to empower participants to take action to help their students connect God's world and Word.

Take action: Find ways to provide more effective facilitation. You can do this by assessing how you're doing as a facilitator, talking with a colleague, and determining 2 action steps you will take.

Frequently asked questions

- 1. What's the thinking behind the sequence of the sessions?**
Session 1 provides an overview and includes a self-assessment. Sessions 2-6 unpack the self-assessment in Session 1. Session 7 targets commitment.
- 2. Do participants need to do the sessions in order?**
Generally speaking, sessions should be completed in order. But the bottom line is to do the sessions in whatever order helps participants help students connect God's world and Word.
- 3. Do participants need to do all sessions?**
No. Participants only need to do the sessions that help them move forward on helping students connect the part of God's world they study and God's Word. If the self-assessment data from Session 1 indicates that participants don't need to complete a given session, then consider skipping that session.
- 4. What's the recommended number of participants?**
You need enough participants to have good interaction and not so many that it feels impersonal. The number of participants could be from 2 to 20. I recommend 6 or more.
- 5. How long should each session be?**
As long as it takes for participants to report on previous action steps, reflect on the session goal, and commit to new action steps that target the session goal. I suggest 60 minutes per session. Here's a sample schedule for a 60-minute session: Connect (7-10), Focus (3-5), Read (5-10), Discuss (25-35), and Commit (10).
- 6. How much time should there be between sessions?**
Enough time for participants to carry out their action steps. I suggest one week.
- 7. What's the thinking behind the structure of the session guides?**
The structure is designed to help teachers apply what they learn. Teachers move from reporting on action steps, to learning, to committing to action. The structure works well for professional learning communities.
- 8. What modifications can the facilitator make to the session guides?**
The facilitator can make whatever modifications will help participants move forward on helping students connect God's world and Word. For example, the facilitator can delete questions, include an additional reading, or show a video.
- 9. What's the thinking behind the sequence of discussion questions in the session guides?**
The discussion questions follow a set sequence. The questions start with facts, move to feelings and experiences, then move to analysis, and conclude with commitment to action.
- 10. Do participants need to discuss all the questions in each session guide?**
No. The questions are designed to get participants talking, to help participants think about the session question, and to help participants make progress on the session goal. If the participants can do this without discussing certain questions, then don't have them discuss those questions.
- 11. In what sequence should the 4 parts of this series be used?**
The 4 parts of this series should be used in whatever sequence helps participants help students connect God's world and Word. Here's one sequence: (1) *Help Your Students Connect God's World and Word*, (2) *Use Assessment*, (3) *Use Questions*, and (4) *Meet Student Learning Needs*. Here's another sequence: (1) *Help Your Students Connect God's World and Word*, (3) *Use Questions*, (4) *Meet Student Learning Needs*, and (2) *Use Assessment*.
- 12. What's the bottom line?**
The bottom line is to get teachers to take action, to do something to help students connect God's world and Word. If teachers can achieve the bottom line more easily without using these materials, don't use them.

My plan for facilitating Session # _____

Date: _____ Time: _____ - _____ Location: _____

Session content (✓ the box if your response is "yes")

- ☐ I understand the significance of the session title and the goal.
- ☐ I have familiarized myself with the session content by reading through the session guide and reading.

Logistics (✓ the box if your response is "yes")

- ☐ I have reserved a place to meet.
- ☐ I have enough desks/chairs.
- ☐ I have enough copies of the session guide and reading.
- ☐ I have informed the participants of things they need to bring.
- ☐ I have selected a seating arrangement.
 - ☐ A circle ☐ Groups of 2-4
 - ☐ A U-shape ☐ Other _____
- ☐ Other: _____

Facilitation plan: Fill in times, select the group size, and select an option.

Time	Section	Group size	Options
_____ - _____	Connect with others	<input type="checkbox"/> Whole group <input type="checkbox"/> Small group <input type="checkbox"/> Pairs	<input type="checkbox"/> Whole group debrief at end <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____
_____ - _____	Focus on this session's goal	<input type="checkbox"/> Whole group <input type="checkbox"/> Small group <input type="checkbox"/> Pairs <input type="checkbox"/> Individual	<input type="checkbox"/> Read the goal aloud <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____
_____ - _____	Read	<input type="checkbox"/> Whole group <input type="checkbox"/> Small group <input type="checkbox"/> Pairs <input type="checkbox"/> Individual	<input type="checkbox"/> One person reads aloud <input type="checkbox"/> Take turns reading aloud <input type="checkbox"/> Read silently <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____
_____ - _____	Discuss the reading	<input type="checkbox"/> Whole group <input type="checkbox"/> Small group <input type="checkbox"/> Pairs	<input type="checkbox"/> Whole group debrief at end <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____
_____ - _____	Commit to action	<input type="checkbox"/> Whole group <input type="checkbox"/> Small group <input type="checkbox"/> Pairs	<input type="checkbox"/> Whole group debrief at end <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____

**Suggested times for 60-minute session: Connect (7-10), Focus (3-5), Read (5-10), Discuss (25-35), and Commit (10).*

Session 1: How effectively are you using assessment to help your students connect God's world and Word?

Connect with a colleague

1. What is one good thing that happened recently in your class(es)?
2. What do you teach your students about God's world and how people are using it?
3. What is one assessment you've given your students?

Focus on this session's goal

To evaluate and improve your use of assessment to help your students connect God's world and Word.

Read

Knowing what exemplary use of assessment looks like can help you find ways to better use assessment. To explore what exemplary use of assessment looks like, read "Reading 1: Reflect on assessment."

Discuss the reading

1. What is one thing that interested you? Tell me about that.
2. What do you like/dislike about using assessment to help students connect God's world and Word?

Find ways you can use assessment

To find ways you can more effectively use assessment to help your students make connections, complete this self-assessment. Rate each item, using the following scale:

4: Strongly agree • 3: Agree • 2: Disagree • 1: Strongly disagree

- ___ 1. I can readily explain how assessment can help my students connect God's world and Word.
- ___ 2. I can readily explain what types of assessment (for example, tests and projects) help my students connect God's world and Word.
- ___ 3. My assessments that require my students to connect God's world and Word are exemplary.
- ___ 4. I prepare my students for my assessments that require my students to connect God's world and Word.
- ___ 5. I use my assessment data to help my students better connect God's world and Word.

Reflect on your self-assessment data with a colleague

1. How many 4s, 3s, 2s, and 1s do you have?
2. What is encouraging/discouraging about your data?
3. To help your students make better connections, what is one self-assessment item you want to make progress on? What are your reasons for selecting that item?
4. What could you do to make progress on that item?

Commit to action

1. What 2 or more action steps are you going to take before our next session to improve your use of assessment to help your students connect God's world and Word?
2. What are your highlights/insights from this session?
3. How can I pray for you? (Pray together.)

Reading 1: Reflect on assessment

Interview with Kim Essenburg, English 10 teacher

What assessment did you give your students?

Kim: My students wrote 750- to 1000-word essays on the following: Part of what's wrong with the world is the tendency to disregard human dignity. Analyze this tendency, using examples from literature, history/current events, and your own experience. Articulate a Christian response to this tendency, using the biblical principles we studied in class on respecting others because they are God's image bearers and on loving our neighbors. Quote *Night* and the Bible at least 3 times each.

What were your students studying?

Kim: The tendency to disregard human dignity as depicted in Elie Wiesel's Holocaust memoir *Night* and the biblical basis of human dignity. At the end of the 3-week unit, my students wrote essays.

How did you prepare your students for the essay?

Kim: To help my students grapple with the tendency to disregard human dignity, I used 2 questions to frame my unit: "What's wrong with the world?" and "Who is my neighbor?" And to prepare my students to write about this tendency, I had them review the feedback they received on the previous essays and had them practice writing a Christian response about disregarding human dignity.

To prepare my students to use literature to analyze this tendency, I had them read *Night*, journal to note instances where human dignity is regarded and disregarded, and talk in small groups. To help my students use history/current events to analyze this tendency, I showed them clips from *Hotel Rwanda* and had them jigsaw 2 articles about war in Darfur and about backlash on Muslims following 9/11. And to help my students use their own life experience, I had students share examples of when they've mistreated others and when they've been mistreated.

To prepare my students to articulate a Christian response to the tendency to disregard human dignity, I taught 2 biblical principles. I also had them work in groups of 4 to study Leviticus 19:18 (which talks about loving our neighbors) and the 7 Bible passages mentioned in the study note. For each of the passages, they identified the speaker, occasion, audience, and purpose.

What connections did your students make between God's world and Word?

Kim: I've typed up the connections my students made. It took awhile, but I think it was worth it because I can easily analyze them now. Here are 4 examples:

1. "Whether it is in the form of murder, bullying, or stealing, people are being treated with less dignity than they deserve....as Christians, we must honor one another as created in God's image and love both our neighbors and our oppressors."
2. "The tendency of humans is to ignore their own mistakes and find fault in others. We look at the Holocaust, World War II, slavery, the nuclear bomb in Hiroshima, and say that these kinds of tragedies should never be repeated.... Yet, we never say, 'I should try my best not to disregard humanity even in small daily cases.'"



Kim, English 10
World literature
52 students

Key assessment result
"We must honor one another as created in God's image."

Tip
Be sure to teach the biblical principles you want students to use in your assessment.

Unit
Night, 3 weeks

Essential questions
What's wrong with the world? Who is my neighbor?

Assessment type
Writing

Teaching strategies
Small groups, discussion, jigsaw, journaling

Resources
Night, Bible, various articles, *Hotel Rwanda*

3. "People always say that they want to make the world a better place, but they think too big or they don't think at all or say that's awful and sit and do nothing. But...one specific thing that I can do is to stop criticizing people.... (Mark 12.31, Matt. 22.39)."
4. "No matter how much you go to church, pray, and read the Bible, if you discriminate against certain people and treat them as though they have no value, you might as well treat God as though He is worthless."

What excites/concerns you about the connections your students made in your assessment?

Kim: I'm excited that more of my students made connections—progress! I'm excited that when they articulated a Christian response to the tendency to disregard human dignity, more students used biblical principles and verses—not just verses, which is what a lot of students had been doing. And I'm excited that they connected biblical principles to their lives.

I'm concerned that some of my students didn't follow the prompt in terms of using the biblical principles we studied in class and in terms of quoting the Bible at least 3 times. I know that some students wanted to be original and used different biblical principles and verses. But the problem is that these often weren't on target. And then some students cited principles without verses, and some cited verses without principles.

How could you help your students connect God's world and Word?

Kim: I could give feedback on the importance of following the assessment prompt. I could do another mini-lesson on how to use both biblical principles and verses when articulating a Christian response. I had them practice writing Christian responses, but I didn't give feedback. I could have them write another Christian response and this time give feedback. For students who are determined to use additional Bible verses, I could teach them how to use cross-references in order to help them find relevant verses.

What will you do?

Kim: On the papers I turned back, I gave feedback on the importance of following the assessment prompt and on using appropriate biblical principles and verses. When I have students practice writing their Christian responses, I'll collect them and give feedback on citing both biblical principles and verses, and on how effectively they used their biblical principles and verses.

Take action: Find ways to improve your use of assessment to help your students connect God's world and Word. You can do this by discussing this reading, by taking a self-assessment on using assessment, and by using your assessment data to identify 2 or more action steps you will take to help your students make connections.

Session 2: How can assessment help your students connect God's world and Word?

Connect with others

1. What is one thing you're excited about regarding student learning?
2. What progress did you make on your action steps? If completed: What did you learn as a result of completing your action steps? If not yet completed: What happened? What will you do to complete your action steps?
3. How does assessment impact student learning?

Focus on this session's goal

To analyze and explain how assessment can help your students connect God's world and Word.

Read

In Christian education, we want our students to connect God's world and Word. Assessment can help students do this. To learn more, read "Reading 2: Assessment helps students make connections."

Discuss the reading

1. What is one thing that interested you? Tell me about that.
2. What positive/negative experiences have you had with using assessment to help your students learn?
3. Explain your thinking for each of A-E: What is the likelihood your students will get better at connecting God's world and Word if they...
 - A. Don't think making connections is important?
 - B. Don't receive instruction on making connections?
 - C. Don't have time to reflect on how God's world and Word are connected?
 - D. Don't get practice making connections?
 - E. Don't get feedback on the connections they make?
4. On a scale of 1-5 (5 being high), how would you rate each of the 5 ways listed in the reading in terms of how well it helps your students make connections? Explain your thinking.
5. How would you explain to parents how assessment can help their students connect God's world and Word?
6. What can you do to get better at explaining how assessment helps your students make connections?

Commit to action

1. What 2 or more action steps are you going to take before our next session to further analyze and explain how assessment can help your students connect God's world and Word?
2. What are your highlights/insights from this session?
3. How can I pray for you? (Pray together.)

Reading 2: Assessment helps students make connections

In Christian education, we want our students to connect God's world and Word.

- When 5th graders study health, we're excited to see them write things like, "The first step in being healthy is to have a good relationship with God."
- When 6th graders study Egypt, we're encouraged to hear them say things like, "The Egyptians believed there were lots of things you had to do to get eternal life. That's why they made mummies. That's not what Christians believe; we know that it's only through Jesus!"
- When 8th graders study the impact of technology, we're glad to hear them say things like, "It's important to be content, rather than wanting the latest technology."
- And when 10th graders study racism as portrayed in *Night*, a Holocaust memoir, we feel good to see them write things like, "I have no right to choose whether I should help or not; the day I chose to follow my consistent and loving God, I threw away the option of apathy."

Question: How can you help your students connect God's world and Word?

Answer: I've found something that really helps students make connections. It's time-tested. It works. And it's something you can do right now. What is it? Assessment. Assessment can help your students connect God's world and Word.

Question: How can assessment help?

Answer: Here are 5 ways assessment helps:

1. *Assessment helps your students think making connections is important.* If your students think making connections is important, they're more likely to connect God's world and Word.
2. *Assessment increases the likelihood your students will receive quality instruction on making connections.* Receiving quality instruction includes getting to see examples of good connections. You are more likely to show your students examples of good connections if you're going to assess making connections than if you're not going to assess making connections.
3. *Assessment gives your students the time they need to reflect in order to make connections.* Give your students time for reflection, for example, by having them develop and give a presentation on how they can use music to serve others or by having them do a case study about how to respond biblically to a pollution problem.
4. *Assessment gives your students practice in making connections.* And practice can help your students make connections. If your 5th graders regularly completed assessments like the following, they would get better at making connections: Write a one-page essay in response to the following question: Would you have fought in the Revolutionary War on the side of the colonists? In your answer, explain why the colonists fought, and explain and then use 2 biblical principles to evaluate why the colonists fought. Conclude with what you would do.
5. *Assessment gives you the opportunity to provide feedback on making connections.* Getting feedback can help your students make better connections. Your feedback might include telling them to support their thinking with biblical principles and verses, not just verses.

Question: What is the likelihood your students will get better at making connections if they don't think making connections is important, don't receive instruction on making connections, don't have time to reflect, don't get practice, and don't get feedback?

Answer: Actually, not that good. Try using assessment. It can help your students better connect God's world and Word.

Take action: Analyze and explain how assessment helps your students make connections. You can do this by discussing this reading and by explaining to 2 colleagues not present at this session how assessment helps.

Session 3: What types of assessment can help your students connect God's world and Word?

Connect with others

1. What is something you've seen God doing in your class recently?
2. What progress did you make on your action steps? If completed: What did you learn as a result of completing your action steps? If not yet completed: What happened? What will you do to complete your action steps?
3. What types of assessment (for example, projects) do you give your students?

Focus on this session's goal

To identify and explain what types of assessment can help your students connect God's world and Word.

Read

Assessment can help students connect God's world and Word. Be sure you know what types of assessment help your students make connections. To learn more, read "Reading 3: What types of assessment can you use?"

Discuss the reading

1. What is one thing that interested you? Tell me about that.
2. What do you like/dislike about each of the types of assessment (for example, projects) you give?
3. What enjoyable/frustrating experiences have you had with using assessment to help your students connect God's world and Word?
4. How would you compare/contrast the 4 assessments listed in the reading (presentations, projects, tests, writing) in terms of how they can help your students connect God's world and Word?
5. If you could only use 2 types of assessment to help your students make connections, which 2 would you use? Explain your thinking.
6. What can you do to get better at explaining what types of assessment can help your students make connections?

Commit to action

1. What 2 or more action steps are you going to take before our next session to further identify and explain what types of assessment can help your students connect God's world and Word?
2. What are your highlights/insights from this session?
3. How can I pray for you? (Pray together.)

**For Session 4, please bring one assessment prompt that you want make even better. This assessment should be one in which you want your students to connect God's world and Word.*

Reading 3: What types of assessment can you use?

You know that assessment can help your students connect God's world and Word. And now you want to take action. You want to design and give your students an effective assessment.

What types of assessment can you use? Please identify 3 types of assessment you can use. Please stop reading and identify 3 types of assessment (for example, projects) right now. Write your answers in the following blanks:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Good. Now that you've identified 3 types of assessment you can use, keep reading.

You can use many types of assessment, including presentations, projects, tests, and writing. At Christian Academy in Japan, for example, different departments use different types of assessment:

1. Presentations: Bible, social studies
2. Projects: Computer, math
3. Tests: English, music, social studies
4. Writing: Art, ESL, science

What might a given type of assessment look like? Here are 4 examples:

1. *Presentation in Social Studies 12*: For a global issue of your choosing, give a 30-minute presentation in which you present (1) a well-researched understanding of its cultural, economic, social, and political implications, both past and present; and (2) a sensible solution based on a biblical perspective.
2. *Project in Math 8*: Mr. Hall wants to buy an Apple computer and does not have enough money to pay up front. As Mr. Hall's financial adviser, develop a poster that outlines what payment plan you recommend he should use. The poster should include a spreadsheet analysis that explains a credit card payment plan, the Apple credit account plan, and the Apple education lease plan. The poster should include your recommendation of the payment plan Mr. Hall should choose and an explanation of how you used a biblical perspective to arrive at this recommendation, citing at least one of the biblical principles on wealth and material goods that we studied in class and citing at least one verse.
3. *Test in English 10 (short answer)*: In this unit we studied "What's the significance of words?" In a well-written paragraph, answer the question. In your paragraph, refer to 2 authors you studied and 2 of the biblical principles you studied.
4. *Writing in Science 2*: Write a 1- or 2-paragraph report about a dinosaur of your choice. Include where the dinosaur lived, when it lived, what it ate, what it looked like, its size, how it got its name, who found it, and any other interesting facts you find. Give 3 examples of how your dinosaur shows God's creativity and power.

Take action: Identify and explain what types of assessment can help your students connect God's world and Word. You can do this by discussing this reading, determining 2 or more types of assessment you can use to help your students connect God's world and Word, and explaining to 2 colleagues not present at this session how those 2 or more types of assessment can help.

Session 4: How can you make your assessments even better?

**For Session 4, you need one assessment prompt that you want make even better. This assessment should be one in which you want your students to connect God's world and Word.*

Connect with others

1. In your class(es), what is one thing that's going well?
2. What progress did you make on your action steps? If completed: What did you learn as a result of completing your action steps? If not yet completed: What happened? What will you do to complete your action steps?
3. What is one characteristic of a good assessment?

Focus on this session's goal

To make one assessment even better.

Read

If you want to use assessment to help your students connect God's world and Word, make sure your assessments are exemplary. Reflecting on the characteristics of good assessment will help you find ways to improve one of your assessments. To learn more, read "Reading 4: What makes a good assessment good?"

Discuss the reading

1. What is one thing that interested you? Tell me about that.
2. What is encouraging/frustrating about the assessments you give?
3. What do you like/dislike about making an assessment even better?

Find ways to make your assessment even better

To find ways you can make your assessment even better, complete the following self-assessment. Rate each statement below. Use the following scale:

4: *Strongly agree* • 3: *Agree* • 2: *Disagree* • 1: *Strongly disagree*

- ___ 1. My assessment is **S**tandards-based.
- ___ 2. My assessment requires students to **C**onnect God's world and Word.
- ___ 3. My assessment gives students **O**pportunities to make choices.
- ___ 4. My assessment is **R**igorous.
- ___ 5. My assessment is **E**ven worthy to be taught to.
- ___ 6. My assessment is **S**tudent-friendly in terms of vocabulary and length.
- ___ 7. My assessment is exemplary—in other words, it **S**CORES.

Reflect on your self-assessment data with a colleague

1. How many 4s, 3s, 2s, and 1s do you have?
2. What is satisfying/unsatisfying about your data?
3. What can you do to make your assessment even better?

Commit to action

1. What 2 or more action steps are you going to take before our next session in order to make your assessment even better?
2. What are your highlights/insights from this session?
3. How can I pray for you? (Pray together.)

Reading 4: What makes a good assessment good?

Me: You want your students to develop a biblical worldview. So, you want to use an assessment to help your students connect God's world and Word. Good. Just make sure your assessment is a good assessment.

You: What makes a good assessment good?

Me: I'll answer that. But first, I'd like to know what you think makes lousy assessment lousy.

You: Well, it doesn't assess what students studied, engage students, or let students make choices.

Me: OK. Now, here's what I think are characteristics of a good assessment:

1. *A good assessment is **Standard-based**.* It is aligned with your curriculum standards (or objectives).
2. *A good assessment requires your students to **Connect God's world and Word**.* Here's an example of an assessment that requires 6th graders to make connections: Construct a model of the solar system that accurately represents planet size and planet distance from the sun. Next, write a paragraph in response to the following question: What does math have to do with God's world? (In your paragraph, make 3 connections between the biblical principles we studied and your model. Include quotations from 2 Bible passages.)
3. *A good assessment gives **Opportunities for student choice, as appropriate**.* Giving students the opportunity to make choices unleashes student learning and potential. I've seen this repeatedly. So have you. Here's an assessment that includes an opportunity for 6th graders to make choices: Give a 5- to 10-minute presentation on a topic of your choice in which you respond to the unit's 3 essential questions (What do you have in common with the ancient Egyptians? How are you different? How could a child of God have responded to the Egyptians?). You must give your presentation from an outline, use a minimum of 3 documented sources, cite at least one biblical principle, and use a visual aid.
4. *A good assessment is **Rigorous**.* A rigorous assessment inspires student learning. In my experience, students enjoy challenging assessments and don't enjoy easy assessments. So, make your assessment rigorous, not easy. Here's an example of a rigorous assessment for 9th graders in science: Use three carbon footprint calculators to estimate your family's and your greenhouse gas emissions. Compare your results with national averages. In the context of using your learning to care for God's creation, identify three ways to reduce your carbon footprint. Next, make a poster that shows what you learned, including your calculations, a graph of your personal footprint, a biblical perspective of carbon footprints, and 3 steps you could take to reduce your carbon footprint.
5. *A good assessment is **Even worthy of being taught to**.* Prepare your students by teaching to the assessment. Just make sure your assessment is actually worthy of being taught to! Here's an example of an assessment for 12th graders that's even worthy of being taught to: In a 1000-word essay, use a biblical perspective to explain the nature of evil, its relationship to suffering, and what you can do to respond in a Christian way to both. Support your thinking using literature, the Bible, and life experience.
6. *A good assessment is **Student-friendly**.* The assessment needs to be student-friendly because your students are taking the assessment. So, use developmentally appropriate vocabulary and keep your assessment prompt to 75 words or less. That's right, 75 words or less. Here's an example of a student-friendly assessment prompt used in Science 8: Give a 5-minute presentation on a piece of electricity-related technology in which you present the electrical device, the science of how it works, and a response to the following questions: How has this device impacted society? What is a biblical perspective of that impact?

Take action: Work to make one of your assessments even better. Ways to do this include discussing this reading, using *SCORES* to analyze one of your assessments and using your analysis to make that assessment even better, asking a colleague for feedback, and taking the assessment to see how it works.

Session 5: How can you prepare your students for your assessment?

Connect with others

1. What is something that happened recently in class that made you smile?
2. What progress did you make on your action steps? If completed: What did you learn as a result of completing your action steps? If not yet completed: What happened? What will you do to complete your action steps?
3. What is one thing you do to prepare your students for an assessment?

Focus on this session's goal

To find ways to prepare your students for an assessment you're going to give that requires your students to connect God's world and Word.

Read

Preparing students for your assessment involves knowing what the assessment is, what your students' learning needs are, what helps your students prepare for an assessment, and when you're going to give your assessment. To find ways to prepare your students, read "Reading 5: Prepare your students for your assessment."

Discuss the reading

1. What is one thing that interested you? Tell me about that.
2. What is comfortable/uncomfortable about preparing your students for an assessment?
3. On a scale of 1-5 (5 being high), how intentional are you about preparing your students for your assessments?
4. What assessment do you want to prepare your students for?
 - A. What excites/concerns you about this assessment?
 - B. What are the key components of this assessment?
5. Which student learning need(s) do you want to meet? (See sidebar in reading.) Explain your selections and 1-2 ways you could meet each need.
6. What engaging instructional strategies can you use? (See sidebar in reading.)
7. How can you prepare your students for each component of your assessment?
8. When can you give your assessment?

Commit to action

1. What 2 or more action steps are you going to take before our next session in order to prepare your students for your assessment and to give your assessment?
2. What are your highlights/insights from this session?
3. How can I pray for you? (Pray together.)

**For Session 6, please bring an assessment prompt you gave your students that required them to connect God's world and Word. Please also bring examples of student learning results from that assessment.*

Reading 5: Prepare your students for your assessment

When preparing your students for an assessment, ask yourself 3 questions:

1. What assessment am I preparing my students for?
2. Which learning need(s) do I want to meet?
3. How can I prepare my students for my assessment?

Imagine you're preparing to teach a Science 8 unit entitled "Electricity and Society." You've identified the standards and benchmarks you need to cover, and you've developed a standards-based assessment.

You ask yourself, "What assessment am I preparing my students for?"

You read over your assessment: Give a 5-minute presentation on a piece of electricity-related technology in which you present the electronic device and the science of how it works, and in which you respond to the following questions: How has this device impacted society? What is a biblical perspective of that impact?

As you read it over, you note 3 components of your assessment:

1. Presentation skills
2. How an electronic device works and the impact of that device
3. A biblical perspective of that impact

Then you ask yourself, "Which learning needs do I want to meet?" (*See sidebar.*) You remember that the last time you gave an assessment, your students struggled with making connections. You think this was because they didn't know enough biblical principles that connected to what they had studied and because they needed more practice in making connections.

Finally you ask yourself, "How can I prepare my students for my assessment?" *To prepare your students to give presentations*, you decide to give mini-lessons on presentation purpose statements and on eye contact. And you decide to have students watch a model presentation, develop presentation outlines, and practice giving their presentations to a classmate, who will then give feedback.

To help students understand how electronic devices work and the impact of electronic devices, you decide to repeatedly ask, "How does technology impact society?" You also decide to have students explore the basics of electricity by experimenting with batteries and light bulbs and by making posters on how electricity impacts their lives. Later, you'll have students select an electronic device and research how it works and what its impact is.

To help your students understand a biblical perspective of technology's impact, you decide to have your students work in small groups to study 3 sets of biblical principles and verses: Be content (1 Tim. 6.6-10), possessions are temporary (Prov. 23.4-5), and don't be selfish (Jas. 2.1-7, 15-16; 4.1-3; 5.1-6). Then, you'll give students practice in connecting those biblical teachings to technology's impact.

Take action: Find ways to prepare your students for an assessment you are going to give. You can do this by discussing this reading, by identifying 2 student learning needs (*see sidebar*) you want to address, and by deciding when you are going to give your assessment.

To connect God's world and Word, do your students need...?

- ☐ To understand the importance of connecting God's world and Word?
- ☐ To learn about specific biblical principles that connect to what they are studying?
- ☐ To know what good connections look like?
- ☐ To connect their lives with God's world and Word?
- ☐ To know what key vocabulary words mean?
- ☐ Time to reflect?
- ☐ Practice making connections?

Which engaging teaching strategies will you use?

- ☐ Asking questions
- ☐ Brainstorming
- ☐ Case studies
- ☐ Compare/contrast
- ☐ Cooperative learning
- ☐ Discussion
- ☐ Drawing pictures
- ☐ Graphic organizers
- ☐ Journaling
- ☐ Role play
- ☐ Simulation
- ☐ Storytelling
- ☐ Testing hypotheses

Session 6: How can you use your assessment data to help your students connect God's world and Word?

**For Session 6, you need an assessment prompt you gave your students that required them to connect God's world and Word. You also need examples of student learning results from that assessment.*

Connect with others

1. What is one way your students are growing?
2. What progress did you make on your action steps? If completed: What did you learn as a result of completing your action steps? If not yet completed: What happened? What will you do to complete your action steps?
3. How do you use your assessment data?

Focus on this session's goal

To use your assessment data to help your students connect God's world and Word.

Read

If you want to more effectively help your students make connections, start by using your assessment data. Start by reflecting on the connections your students are making in the assessments you give. To learn more, read "Reading 6: Use your assessment data to help your students make connections."

Discuss the reading

1. What is one thing that interested you? Tell me about that.
2. What is easy/challenging about using assessment data?
3. What assessment did you give your students?
 - A. What were your students studying?
 - B. How did you prepare your students for the assessment?
 - C. What are some connections your students made between what they studied and what the Bible teaches?
 - D. What excites/concerns you about the connections your students made in your assessment?
4. How can you use your assessment data to help your students connect God's world and Word?

Commit to action

1. What 2 or more action steps are you going to take before our next session in order to use your assessment data to help your students connect God's world and Word?
2. What are your highlights/insights from this session?
3. How can I pray for you? (Pray together.)

Reading 6: Use your assessment data to help your students make connections

Imagine that you're teaching Social Studies 7. You've just finished grading some projects in which you required your students to connect what they studied and biblical principles. The grades are entered in your grade book, and the feedback sheets are ready to be passed back tomorrow. And you're thinking about getting ready for your next unit.

Stop: Before you get ready for your next unit, take time to reflect on your assessment results. Take time to reflect on the connections your students made, how you feel about those connections, and how you can modify instruction to help students connect God's world and Word.

This doesn't need to take more than 30 minutes. (And not doing this makes about as much sense as a basketball coach not reviewing game stats to determine what to do in practice.)

So, take time to reflect on your assessment results by yourself or with a partner. I recommend you reflect on a set of questions, for example:

1. What assessment did you give your students?
2. What were your students studying?
3. How did you prepare your students for the assessment?
4. What are some connections your students made between God's world and Word? What excites/concerns you about the connections your students made in your assessment?
5. How can you help your students connect God's world and Word?
6. What will you do?

Here are 3 examples of using assessment data to help students connect

God's world and Word: In their projects, your Social Studies 7 students didn't demonstrate depth of understanding regarding the biblical principles they cited. You think about your next unit. You had planned to have your students do a homework assignment in which they would identify their own principles. Instead, you decide to select 5 key biblical principles and have your students study them for 2 class periods.

In their presentations, your Science 8 students used object lessons (for example, that Jesus is the light of the world) instead of connections between what they studied (for example, light) and biblical principles regarding God's creative power. You decide to do a lesson on the difference between object lessons and really connecting God's world and Word.

In their essays, your English 10 students didn't effectively weave biblical perspective into their essays. You decide to teach a lesson to help students (1) include biblical perspective in the topic sentence and (2) state the topic sentence first and then support it with Bible verses.

Take action: Use your assessment data to find ways to help your students connect God's world and Word. You can do this by discussing this reading and by taking 20 minutes to reflect with a colleague on the results of an assessment you've recently given. (Be sure to bring your assessment and assessment data to the reflection time.)

How can you use assessment data to help your students connect God's world and Word?

You can have your students submit a question on the connections they made. Then you can respond to each question.

You can give your students time in class to read your feedback on connections, review their rubric scores on connections, talk with a partner about 1-2 action steps they want to take to make better connections, and to write those action steps down.

You can type up examples of your students connecting God's world and Word, and then analyze those connections in order to find ways to modify instruction.

You can reflect on your assessment data with a colleague in order to identify 1-2 action steps you will take to help students make connections.

You can talk with teachers at your grade level about assessment data on connections in order to develop a team action plan.

Session 7: How committed are you to using assessment to help your students connect God's world and Word?

Connect with others

1. What is one thing you like about teaching at this school?
2. What progress did you make on your action steps? If completed: What did you learn as a result of completing your action steps? If not yet completed: What happened? What will you do to complete your action steps?
3. In terms of assessment, what is one thing you're committed to?

Focus on this session's goal

To increase your commitment to using assessment to help your students connect God's world and Word.

Read

Commitment involves more than words. Commitment involves action. So if you want to know how committed you are to using assessment, look at the extent to which you use assessment to help your students connect God's world and Word. To learn more, read "Reading 7: How committed are you to using assessment?"

Discuss the reading

1. What is one thing that interested you? Tell me about that.
2. How do you feel about being committed to using assessment to help your students connect God's world and Word?
3. In a class you teach, how many assessments do you give each year? (Include things like daily work, presentations, projects, essays, quizzes, and tests.)
 - A. How many of these assessments require your students to connect God's world and Word?
 - B. Of the assessments that require your students to connect God's world and Word, how many of them are exemplary? (Meaning, how many of them are standards-based, provide opportunities for student choice, are rigorous, are even worthy of being taught to, and are student-friendly?)
 - C. So, what percentage of your assessments are exemplary assessments that require your students to connect God's world and Word?
4. Explain your thinking for each of A-C: On a scale of 1-5 (5 being high)...
 - A. How effectively do you prepare your students for your assessments?
 - B. How effectively do you use your assessment results?
 - C. How effectively do you encourage/train your colleagues to use assessment to help students make connections?
5. How committed are you really to using assessment to help your students connect God's world and Word?
6. To increase your real level of commitment, what do you need to keep doing? start doing? stop doing?

Commit to action

1. What 2 or more action steps are you going to take in order to increase your real level of commitment to using assessment to help students connect God's world and Word?
2. What are your highlights/insights from this session?
3. How can I pray for you? (Pray together.)

I would enjoy learning about how you are using assessment to help your students connect God's world and Word. Please email me at <learnmore@closethegapnow.org>. —Michael B. Essenburg

Reading 7: How committed are you to using assessment?

We know our real level of commitment is best demonstrated by our actions. So, we know that the real level of commitment of the following students is not high:

- I'm committed to doing well on the social studies test. I'll study for 3 minutes on the morning of the test.
- I'm committed to getting good at playing the piano. I practice for 10 minutes each month.
- I'm committed to getting my homework done on time. Only half of my assignments are turned in late.

We also know that the real level of commitment of the following school staff is not high:

- As a superintendent, I'm committed to talking with parents and staff. I do this for 10 minutes each week.
- As a principal, I'm committed to visiting classes. I visited classes for a total of 15 minutes this past semester.
- As a curriculum coordinator, I'm committed to using assessment data to improve student learning. I review the results of classroom assessments and standardized tests every 5 years.

And we know that the real level of commitment of the following teachers is not high:

- I'm a 2nd grade language arts teacher who is committed to students writing well. Each year, my students write one journal entry.
- I'm a middle school Bible teacher who is committed to students memorizing God's Word. Each year, my students memorize 3 verses.
- I'm a high school science teacher who is committed to students doing labs. Each year, my students do 2 labs.

In Christian education, we're committed to helping our students connect God's world and Word. We know that assessment helps students make connections. So, we're committed to using assessment to help our students make these connections.

Question: What is your real level of commitment to using assessment to help your students connect God's world and Word?

To determine your response, reflect on questions like these:

1. In a class you teach, how many assessments do you give each year? (Include things like daily work, presentations, projects, essays, quizzes, and tests.)
2. How many of these assessments require your students to connect God's world and Word?
3. Of the assessments that require your students to connect God's world and Word, how many of them are exemplary? (Meaning, how many of them are standards-based, provide opportunities for student choice, are rigorous, are even worthy of being taught to, and are student-friendly?)
4. On a scale of 1-5 (5 being high), how effectively do you...?
 - a. Prepare your students for your assessments?
 - b. Use your assessment data?
 - c. Encourage/train your colleagues to use assessment to help students make connections?
5. How committed are you really to using assessment to help your students connect God's world and Word?

Take action: Increase your real level of commitment. Ways to do this include:

- Discussing this reading.
- Giving 3 more assessments in one of the classes you teach that require your students to connect God's world and Word.
- Using *SCORES* to make 2 of your assessments even better.
- More effectively preparing your students for one of your assessments by meeting 2 of their learning needs.
- More effectively using your assessment data to help your students make connections.
- Encouraging 2 colleagues not at this session to use assessment to help their students connect God's world and Word.