

 **Module 1b Reading
Resource: Assessment
as Inquiry**
TruePath Learning, LLC™
Professional Development
Series: Advancing
Institutional Assessment and
Effectiveness

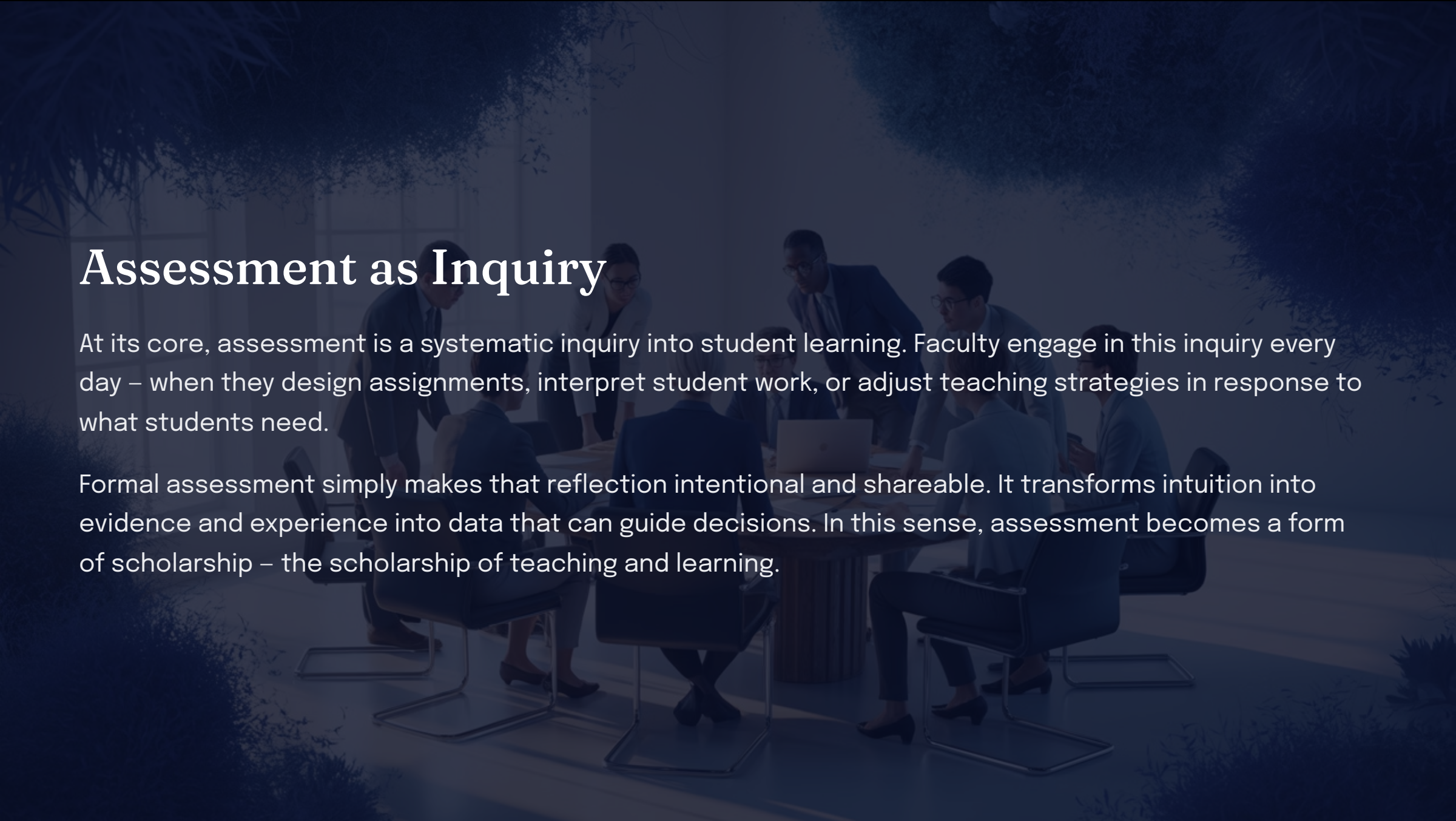


Introduction

Rethinking Assessment

In higher education, assessment is often misunderstood. It's sometimes seen as a report to complete, a compliance box to check, or a process disconnected from the daily realities of teaching and learning. However, meaningful assessment is not about external accountability – it's about **curiosity and evidence**. It invites us to ask: *What are students learning, how do we know, and what can we do with that information?*

When viewed as inquiry rather than inspection, assessment becomes a reflective, empowering process that connects teaching, learning, and improvement.

A group of seven professionals, four men and three women, are gathered around a large, light-colored wooden table outdoors. They are dressed in business attire, including suits and blouses. Some are standing and leaning over the table, while others are seated. A laptop is open on the table. The background shows a modern building with large windows and lush green trees, suggesting a corporate or academic setting. The overall tone is professional and collaborative.

Assessment as Inquiry

At its core, assessment is a systematic inquiry into student learning. Faculty engage in this inquiry every day – when they design assignments, interpret student work, or adjust teaching strategies in response to what students need.

Formal assessment simply makes that reflection intentional and shareable. It transforms intuition into evidence and experience into data that can guide decisions. In this sense, assessment becomes a form of scholarship – the scholarship of teaching and learning.

The Mindset Shift: From Compliance to Curiosity

A culture of compliance asks:

What do we have to measure?

A culture of curiosity asks:

What do we want to understand?

When faculty approach assessment from a place of curiosity, the process becomes more authentic. It allows educators to investigate the impact of their teaching decisions, uncover hidden barriers to learning, and design changes that make a difference.

This mindset shift also reduces resistance to assessment. Instead of feeling imposed, the process feels relevant – a tool for improvement rather than evaluation.

Key Principles of Assessment as Inquiry



Purpose Before Process

Begin by clarifying why assessment matters in your context. What do you hope to learn or improve? When the purpose is clear, the process becomes meaningful.



Alignment and Transparency

Align outcomes, learning activities, and assessments so students know what success looks like. Transparency increases engagement and reduces anxiety about grading.



Multiple Measures of Learning

Use diverse forms of evidence – exams, projects, reflections, and discussions – to capture different dimensions of learning. No single measure tells the whole story.



Equity and Inclusion

Assessment should reveal opportunity gaps, not reinforce them. By disaggregating data and considering diverse learning experiences, educators can identify where inequities exist and act to close them.



Reflection and Feedback

Assessment is most valuable when it leads to reflection – both for students and faculty. Closing the loop through feedback and dialogue ensures that evidence leads to action.

Balancing Improvement and Accountability



While assessment as inquiry centers on learning, accountability remains essential. Accrediting bodies, boards, and the public expect institutions to demonstrate quality and integrity. But compliance should not overshadow improvement.

The most effective assessment systems integrate both – they satisfy external expectations *and* drive internal reflection. When faculty own the process, they naturally produce evidence that fulfills both purposes.

Building a Culture of Evidence

A culture of evidence develops gradually through collaboration and trust. It begins when faculty see value in collecting and discussing data about learning, and when leaders support time and space for that reflection. It grows when results are used constructively – to celebrate success, guide development, and inform decisions.

True institutional improvement doesn't come from mandates. It comes from shared inquiry and transparent communication about what's working and why.



Conclusion

Assessment as a Habit of Mind

Ultimately, assessment is not a form or a deadline – it's a habit of mind. It invites educators to stay curious, to use evidence thoughtfully, and to see learning as a shared journey. When viewed through this lens, assessment becomes an integral part of teaching – a natural, ongoing inquiry into how we can best support student success.

Reflection Prompts

Use these prompts to connect today's reading to your own context:

How does your current approach to assessment reflect — or differ from — the idea of "assessment as inquiry"?

In what ways could you make assessment more reflective, inclusive, or collaborative?

What data or evidence do you already have that could inform improvement in your teaching or program?