

REASONING AND PROBLEM SOLVING

The Seesaw App: Providing Differentiated Assessment Opportunities

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ASSessment. IT IS SUCH AN IMPORTANT, but challenging part of our job. Summative, formative, open-ended, peer, project-based: the list of assessments that we “should” and can use goes on and on. This summer I took a class through my district titled “Assessment is not a Dirty Word.” It made me realize how much stress, struggle and, in general, negative emotions surround the use of assessments (for both students and teachers). And yet, it is a necessary part of teaching and learning, and can be used in effective ways. Assessments can, of course, be used to collect data and give students grades, but they can also provide valuable information for moving forward in learning in our classroom, all while being something that bring students pride and joy.

My challenge over the last couple of years has been how I differentiate my assessment to meet all students’ needs. Some students do well with the “traditional” types of assessments and they are proud of the work they put into them. Others are continually frustrated because they cannot fully show their understanding of concepts through writing. I have found that although traditional assessments of paper and pencil are necessary and helpful at times, they do not give me a complete picture of student knowledge. This is when I discovered the app, Seesaw. Although not THE answer to assessment (my goal in seeking it out was to make it one of a variety of ways I assess students), it has become one of my (and my students’) favorite.

Seesaw is simply an app that allows students to create drawings, videos, and pictures that become part of an online portfolio. Parents have access to everything their students post, so it also becomes a great communication tool between teachers and parents. Seesaw’s [website](#) says it best: “Seesaw empowers students to independently document their learning with built-in creative tools, and provides an

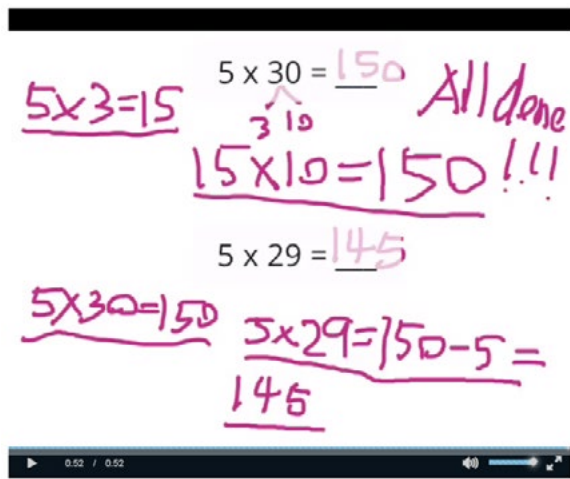
authentic audience for their work. Seesaw saves time on organization and parent communication, makes formative assessment easy, and provides a safe place to teach 21st Century skills.” I have eight iPads in my classroom of 28 students, and this is plenty to be able to use Seesaw effectively.

At first, I used Seesaw for more obvious types of assessments:

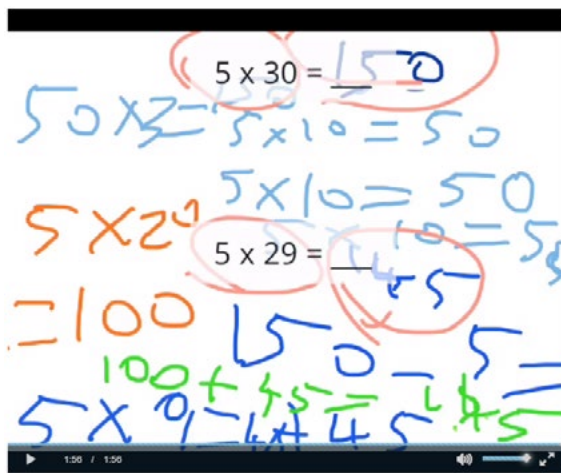
- Vocabulary words illustrated and described by students.
- Presentations of student research.
- Videotapes of student-to-student interviews.

Then I discovered the power of using it for math assessments. All students could create their own number or math talk on these videos, and I could watch them outside of class time. Each student was able to have a voice, even if we did not have time to listen to each one every day in class. In addition, I found that some students who struggled with putting their thinking into writing had a much easier time explaining in a video. Although these videos cannot replace written thinking (PARCC now requires students to write a lot of their thinking processes down), it is a step that can help students get there. In addition, it allows me to gain a better understanding of what students really know and understand about different concepts.

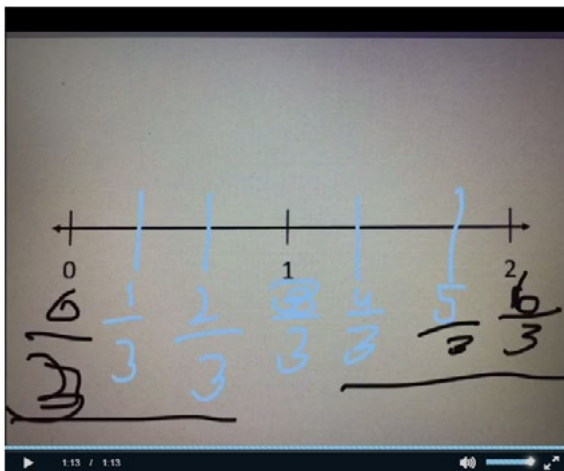
The following two videos were all done before conferences so that students could show their parents their fluency in thinking through multiplication problems. Jenny, a student who came to me with very little English at the beginning of the year, was able to show a strong understanding of multiplication in the following video:



Jim, a student who often struggled with writing in general, but especially in math, created this video:

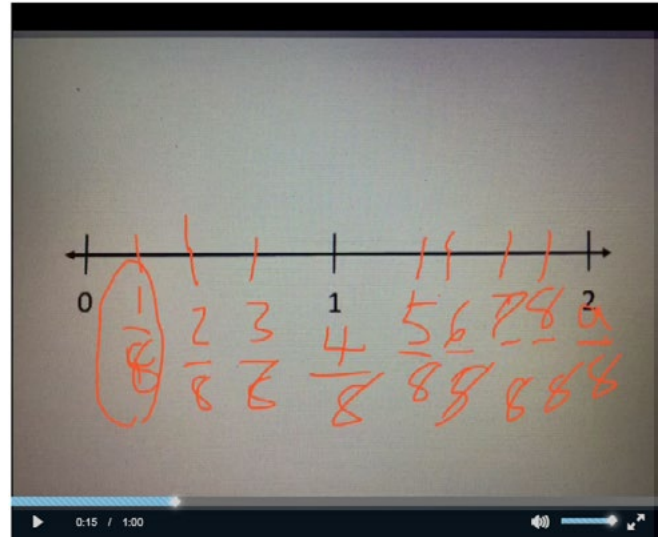


I also used Seesaw to have students explain more complex concepts like fractions. The following is a video of a student, Michael, who was on an IEP. This video shows his developing understanding of fractions better than any written assessment I ever received from him:

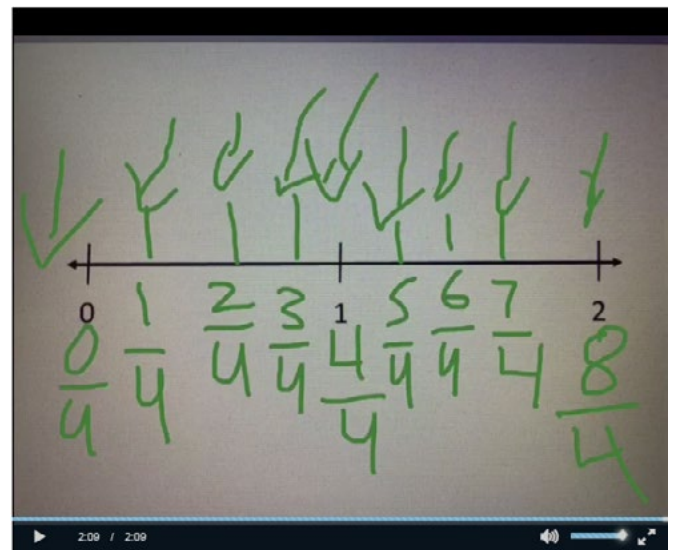


These videos also allowed me to understand

students' misunderstandings better. The following shows a video of Sarah, who does not understand the use of a number line to show fractions, but who does have some grasp of the concept of fractions through a partitioned shape model:



And finally, these videos allow students to go above and beyond and show me deeper understandings of the concept, which I did not necessarily ask them to show me. Andrew in the video below not only demonstrated his knowledge of fractions on a number line, but also his strong understanding of equivalent fractions.



As you can see, Seesaw allows me to delve deeper into my students' minds while helping to build confidence in students as they enjoy creating these videos for others (myself, their classmates, and their parents) to watch. It has become a staple in my repertoire of assessment methods, and I look forward to finding new and exciting ways to use it in the upcoming school year.