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To celebrate the end of the first season of the Ten-minute Teacher podcast on June 16<sup>th</sup>, we're running a giveaway – the Dash and Dot Robot Wonder Pack from Wonder Workshop. Stay tuned at the end of the show for how to enter. [www.coolcatteacher.com/wonder](http://www.coolcatteacher.com/wonder)

This is Episode 89. Alan November's mind-blowing assessment idea.

*The Ten-minute Teacher podcast with Vicki Davis. Every week day you'll learn powerful practical ways to be a more remarkable teacher today.*

VICKI: Today, we're going to talk about improving our schools with assessment. And we have thought leader Alan November [@globalelearner](https://twitter.com/globalelearner) with us today. So, Alan, you have an easy idea for how we can improve our assessment. What is it?

ALAN: I do. The only problem is, Vicki, it's counterintuitive. So I always warn people; don't reject this idea as soon as you hear it. Let it sink for a moment. I first saw this at Harvard, but since then I've seen it in elementary schools and middle and high school. And it was well-researched by the Dean of Applied Physics at Harvard, Eric Mazur, [@eric\\_mazur](https://twitter.com/eric_mazur) who took a semester off to try to figure out how to improve learning. And in Indonesia, he discovered a teacher who after the kids took their own individual test, the teacher arranged teams, three, four, five kids in a team, and the team had to take the exact same test again and submit it. And 50% of their grade was their individual test, and the other half was the team test. The professor or the teacher did not give the students the answers. So the students had to ask each other, you know, what did you get for number one, why did you get that. And what's fascinating is compared to a teacher taking home a test and correcting it, bring it back the next day; if the kid made a mistake already and you just tell them the answer, it doesn't necessarily help the student understand how they got it wrong.

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And not only that, but a lot of the kids who got things wrong are not going to raise their hand in the middle of getting a test back and ask the teacher to explain it again, because it was already explained and the kids are too embarrassed to do that.

But as kids talk to each other, there's this explosion of debate. I watched Eric do this at Harvard. As he walks around and he listens to students debate the answers, he learns a lot more than when he corrects individual tests. He learns about the thinking of the students, and he understands that students explain things in ways that are quite different because of the first-time learner phenomena, sometimes easier to understand than when he's explained it. And then at the end of that second round, he just gives the class the answers. So he doesn't go over the class test the next day. It saves all that time, and it leads to a lot more learning. In fact,

the data at Harvard shows that the results on the final exam, if you did this all year, are significantly higher than educators who do not allow students to take the same test twice.

VICKI: Wow. Now, the final exam, though, was individual. Did he do the group thing on the final too?

ALAN: Final exam is individual.

VICKI: Wow. I'm intrigued. I mean, it makes total sense. And the thing is about, when going over questions after the test, a lot of kids who didn't get it say, well, they don't understand the cumulative power of what they're learning, but if they don't learn it now they're not going to not know it forever. And so they have a motivation to actually learn it because they want to get it right.

ALAN: So I just think we have to come to grips with, every kid is not motivated equally. All kinds of reasons for that, Vicki. I'm not blaming the kid or the teacher. The reality is that kids are social by nature. They want to talk to their friends; they want to know what their friends are thinking. So it fits in to natural behavior. So I'm not going to claim that kids are going to be more motivated. But what I will claim is kids will listen to other kids explain things and question one another the way they might not listen and question the teacher when they go over the test.

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VICKI: So when you saw it a middle school level, how did it look, compared to Harvard?

ALAN: Yeah, I actually have a video of it. (See <http://novemberlearning.com/educational-resources-for-educators/teaching-and-learning-articles/assessment-for-learning/>) We pulled quotes, Vicki. You can hear kids say, "Well, I know our teacher explained it like this, but I'm going to explain it a different way." You know, all kinds of simple stories that go with the explanation. Kids saying, "How did you get that? I still don't understand." So you hear them asking more than once, twice, even three times; which you would probably never hear that same kid ask a teacher in a classroom three times. And if the teacher is listening, which any good teacher would do, they get so much insight into learning how their students are thinking that is not represented by answers alone when they correct those tests. I've had teachers just blown away at the reasoning of some of their students who even got the answer correct but the reasoning is incorrect. You haven't heard this.

VICKI: No, I haven't. I mean, it totally makes sense. I believe that it would work. I do. It makes sense with what I know about kids.

ALAN: Well, Eric Mazur, who further developed this, is just a genius. And he happens to be a friend of mine. So, you know, I get to over and watch and teach. He's not in K-12. And I'll tell you what else; you start explaining that this is at Harvard, and immediately you can see some teachers push back and say, "Well, that's great for

Harvard kids. I don't have Harvard kids." But it works even better for kids who are undermotivated.

VICKI: Oh, yeah, I would think so. And middle schoolers and high schoolers. So how would a teacher start with this? Let's say they were nervous about starting with a test. Could they start with something a little lower stakes maybe?

ALAN: I've had lots of teachers adopt this. Some teachers have decided, they're going to give a practice test first in a group, different questions than what's going to be on the individual test but same content. And the group takes this practice test.

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And then the next day, after they've had a chance to think about what they don't know and study some more, they give the individual test. So they reverse it from what Eric does at Harvard. Other teachers – Eric does 50-50 in terms of points; so 50% for the individual score, and 50% for the group score. And a lot of teachers, frankly, are uncomfortable with that because they think, if you didn't study and you didn't do well and you got an F on the individual and you just rode along with the group for the second test, you could get a C but you didn't study. So some teachers will do 70-30 or even 80-20, because they don't want to lose control of, frankly, catching kids who haven't studied.

VICKI: Well, isn't it about what they know, though, when you're done?

ALAN: Well, Vicki, yes, it is. I'm just telling you what I'm seeing. Vicki, I cannot explain all teacher behavior. I've learned not to try. And, for whatever reason, a lot of teachers are uncomfortable sharing the point spread between the individual and the group.

VICKI: I guess in some ways I feel like a renegade or a rebel. I just want them to learn it. I mean, I'm going to get there ethically, but whatever it takes, you know. I'm just thinking about some of the hardest things I teach and how powerful this would – because I'll tell you this; when you put kids together in groups, it can be difficult to get the stronger kids highly motivated to help the kids who struggle, because they kind of feel like, "Well, that's your job, teacher."

ALAN: Well, like a good coach. Some teachers have told me they put all the A kids together because they'll fight over the last point. And they don't worry about helping other kids because they know they're all good students. So I'm going to leave that up to the teacher, how they mix the kids. What I have learned is you don't want to just let kids pick their own teams. You really want to be a good coach and figure out the mix. And what Eric does is every month or so, you're on a new team.

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So by the end of the year, you'd actually work with everybody in the class at least once, on a different team.

VICKI: I like that.

ALAN: Yeah. And Eric does one more thing. At the end of the second test, each team has to write an application question; one question. They have to show the answer to their own question. And then that question is sent to another team. So each team gets a question written by another team in the third round. And it turns out, this is where Eric learns the most. Usually, students write more difficult questions than he did. And he finds out, by the design of questions and by listening to who's really designing these questions, what's in kids' imagination. Because asking a good question, frankly, is more difficult than answering a questions that's been handed to you. That's a whole skill set.

VICKI: But I'm just dying to see what it looks like in the classroom, in my own classroom, because it truly does fit with what I know about teaching. And I'll be interested to hear all of your thoughts on your comments on the show notes, because this is fantastic. Thank you, Alan.

ALAN: Well, Vicki, let me just warn you. The kids are so used to taking their own test that it may take a couple of experiences to get them to become engaged with the team.

VICKI: Interesting. Yeah, and I could see parents saying, why are you doing this too, so.

ALAN: You know what; if you're interested more in learning than in grading, it's an idea worth trying.

On June 16<sup>th</sup>, we'll finish up season one of the Ten-minute Teacher. So to celebrate, we've partnered with one of my favorite robots for teaching coding – Dash and Dot from Wonder Workshop. Go to [coolcatteacher.com/wonder](http://coolcatteacher.com/wonder) and enter to win your very own Wonder Pack from Wonder Workshop. And to learn more about how you can use Dash and Dot to teach programming to kids, aged, kindergarten and up.

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