

Conceptual Articles

Title of Article/Chapter	Commentary: Evaluating the Validity of Formative and Interim Assessment
Source Title (journal, book, etc.)	Educational Measurement: Issues and Practice National Council on Measurement in Education Volume 28 No. 3 pp. 32-37
Author(s)	Lorrie A Shepard
Year	2009
Participant Focus (teachers/students/etc.)	This article is simultaneously focused on both students and teachers as it is based on formative assessments and their validity inside the classroom and learning/teaching practice.
Topic	How formative assessment can be used to improve student learning must be embedded in rich curriculum and must at the same time attempt to foster instructional practices consistent with learning research.
Main Findings	<p>Research shows that formative assessments are recognized to be a powerful tool for improving student learning. Teacher knowledge is needed, in order to implement formative assessments effectively by providing feedback. Feedback is more likely to lead to improved student learning when it is directly tied to successful completion of the learning task and clear guidance that promotes mindfulness from the student. In other words, formative assessments are only a successful tool, if the teacher is directly involved, providing clear instructions and feedback to students, in order to promote student engagement throughout the lesson. Other features that are imperative to the formative assessment process include; students' self-perception, classroom discourse practices, quality of assessment tasks and teacher questioning.</p> <p>The importance of feedback over corrections lies on the difference of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. It gives us the ability to encourage students to focus more on their abilities rather than on praise. We must also take into consideration our students' culture. It makes a difference in how they interpret and respond to various assessment practices. This articles encourages</p>

educators to shy away from teaching to the test where the warm up, lesson and assessment all look the same.

Several learning theory frameworks have inferred throughout the relationships between specific assessment strategies and assumptions about learning.

- Behaviorist theory – treats learning as isomorphic with test performance. It supports the use of external rewards and less challenging tasks to ensure the opportunity to reinforce successful performance.
- Sociocultural theory – incorporates cognitive theories that focus on mental representations. Additionally, they account for the social and interactive ways that language constructions and ways of thinking are practiced.

These theories provide straightforward explanations as to why feedback improves learning in some studies and actually harms it in others, and they are critical to an understanding of how formative assessment works, when it does work.

Formative assessment is a process used by teachers and students during instruction that provides feedback to adjust ongoing teaching and learning to improve students' achievement of intended instructional outcomes. Interventions using formative assessments must have a positive effect on learning to substantiate the validity claim. The assessment phase of the formative assessment, represents the knowledge and skills intended to be taught and mastered by the student as inferred from observations and student data. The instruction phase is the teaching model used to create an instructional plan to close the gap between the student's current understanding and the targeted understanding. The final stage, the summative phase, repeats data collection from the formative phase to determine whether the process has been effective. It is important to keep in mind the psychology of learning, including assumptions about the motivations and self-perceptions of students, may be implicit or explicit in the teaching model.

To serve a formative function, the information must fit as a component of a system of coordinated assessment and instruction. For assessment to be formative the feedback information has to be used. If you are not using the findings of a formative assessment, you will not be able to determine the next instructional steps needed for student learning to take place.

A sound model of a student's progression in the learning of the subject matter is required, in order to match the student's trajectory of learning to the criteria that guided the formative

assessment. Developing student learning progressions, requires expert knowledge and empirical evidence of student progress under conditions of effective instruction. Learning progressions are usually made available by your state/district.

Although interim assessments are widely used as a state-level, summative assessments and in classroom instruction, research indicates that resources would be better spent helping teachers learn formative assessment techniques, including using the information to intervene with students who do not yet understand key concepts, rather than on mini-summative assessments often used at the district/state levels.

There are three different purposes for interim assessments – instructional, evaluative and predictive. How the information from the test will be used, what inferences will be drawn from the evidence and is there proof that the outcomes are as intended. The evaluative use of interim assessments is broadest because it provides information about programs rather than about individual students. Good questions to ask about interim assessments would be, “what can the assessment tell us about the quality of our curriculum and instructional programs and are the subscales of the proposed assessment reliable enough to support such inferences?”

In contrast to the many multiple-choice interim assessment products available, focused primarily on scoring and ranking of students, there are a few collections of instructionally focused assessment tasks that districts may also want to consider. These products don’t offer scores to compare schools or predict end-of-year state results, but they will enable greater teacher learning about student learning.

In conclusion, formative information is of little use if teachers don’t know what to do when students are unable to grasp an important concept. Validity investigations are needed but when they are not being measured by curriculum and subject matter experts, it provides a limited value. This is one reason why the development of learning progressions depends greatly on addressing measurement questions while also considering corresponding content and learning questions. In order for formative assessment to be used to improve student learning, it must be embedded in rich curriculum and must at the same time attempt to foster instructional practices consistent with research on learning.

