

Why Should We Use Formative Assessments?

“There is strong and rigorous evidence that improving formative assessment can raise standards of pupils’ performance. There have been few initiatives in education with such a strong body of evidence to support a claim to raise standards” (Black & Wiliam, 1998, p. 20).

“Studies have demonstrated assessment *for* learning rivals one-on-one tutoring in its effectiveness and that the use of assessment particularly benefits low-achieving students” (Stiggins, 2004, p. 27).

“Assessment for learning . . . when done well, this is one of the most powerful, high-leverage strategies for improving student learning that we know of. Educators collectively at the district and school levels become more skilled and focused at assessing, disaggregating, and using student achievement as a tool for ongoing improvement” (Fullan, 2005, p. 71).

“[Formative assessments are] ‘one of the most powerful weapons in a teacher’s arsenal.’ An effective standards-based, formative assessment program can help to dramatically enhance student achievement throughout the K-12 system” (Marzano, 2006, back cover).

Effective use of formative assessment, developed through teacher learning communities, promises not only the largest potential gains in student achievement but also a process for affordable teacher professional development (Wiliam & Thompson, 2007).

“Deeper learning is enhanced when formative assessment is used to: (1) make learning goals clear to students; (2) continuously monitor, provide feedback, and respond to students’ learning progress; and (3) involve students in self- and peer assessment” (Pellegrino & Hilton, 2012, p. 166).

“Formative assessment works. That’s right: Ample research evidence is now at hand to indicate emphatically that when the formative-assessment process is used, students learn better—lots better. It’s really not surprising that formative assessment works so well. What is surprising is how few U.S. teachers use the process” (Popham, 2013, p. 29).

“Teachers are reluctant to persist in implementing new practices in the absence of evidence that what they’re doing makes a positive difference. Therefore, it’s important to build some mechanism into the implementation process to show teachers that these new practices are working. . . . Because teachers have the most confidence in evidence they gather themselves, results from classroom formative assessments provide an ideal feedback source” (Guskey, 2014).

“One characteristic that separates good teaching from masterful teaching is the teacher’s routine use of formative assessment techniques that are embedded in every lesson” (Venables & Venables, 2014, as cited in Ferlazzo, 2014).

The major purpose of assessment in schools should be to provide interpretative information to teachers and school leaders about their impact on students, so that these educators have the best information possible about what steps to take with instruction and how they need to change and adapt. Using assessments as feedback for teachers is powerful. And this power is truly maximized when the assessments are timely, informative, and related to what teachers are actually teaching (Hattie, 2015c).

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