

Transcript – Formative Assessments

In general, formative assessment is defined as a systematic process to continuously gather evidence. Furthermore, formative assessment places agency for the improvement of learning on both the teacher and student as they move through a unit of instruction. Last, the National Research Council says that formative assessment is critical to a teachers' ability to plan for, support, and assess the quality of students' experiences learning in mathematics.

Thus, formative assessment is a process of gathering information, dependent on both the teacher and the student and is critical to a teachers' ability to support a student. How do these definitions of formative assessment compare with your past experiences with assessment? Write down your thoughts on page fourteen of your learning portfolio.

Formative assessment can take three forms, which can be thought of as a continuum. First, formative assessment can be on-the-fly, going beyond traditional classroom interactions. Teachers can ask specific questions to evaluate the level of understanding rather than simply checking to see if a student answered correctly (White and Gunstone, 1992). For example, instead of just asking students for their answers, a teacher may ask them to explain how they got to their answers.

In planned-for formative assessment, conversations during daily classroom talk allow the teacher to acquire information on an informal basis. These conversations can be planned to recognize student conceptions, address misconceptions and errors, identify strategies, and help make connections to other concepts. For example, a teacher may probe a student with questions after he works through a problem. These questions could include the following: "Why did you work the problem in this way?" "What were you thinking as you worked the problem?" "What strategy or strategies did you use to solve the problem?"

Last, there is systems-level formative assessment that occurs when specific assessments are created and used to understand students' thinking. These assessments allow teachers to monitor students' progress, provide students with feedback on their performance, and modify instruction based on students' unique learning needs. They are time efficient, they are often computer based, and they provide immediate feedback for teachers. These systems are designed to influence teaching in ways that high-stakes testing do not. These include a screener, a diagnostic, and a progress monitoring tool.

Take a moment to reflect on page fifteen on how you currently use on-the-go, planned for, and systems-level formative assessment in your teaching.

Transcript – Formative Assessments (continued)

In a systems-level formative assessment, a screener helps to identify the students’ “starting place.” It can provide information on a student’s strengths as well as a student’s areas of difficulty. The diagnostic assessment enables us to better understand specific skill areas where students need assistance; it provides a deeper level of understanding than is provided through a screener. Diagnostic assessments also help teachers understand students’ preconceptions. Last, progress monitoring allows teachers to keep track of students’ progress toward meeting the instructional objective.

By using the ESTAR/MSTAR learning progressions and the ESTAR/MSTAR systems-level formative assessments as they were designed, teachers are able to understand students’ thinking by screening the students, identifying possible student misconceptions and errors with diagnostic assessments, and individualizing instruction based on students’ needs with progress monitoring.

The ESTAR/MSTAR Diagnostic Assessments were created for this purpose, to provide teachers with a tool to understand why a student is struggling. The ESTAR/MSTAR Universal Screener and the ESTAR/MSTAR Diagnostic Assessments are two tools that can be used to help teachers with Response to Intervention implementation, but they serve two different purposes. Let’s look at the difference between the purposes of each assessment. Make sure to take notes on page sixteen of your learning portfolio as we talk about each one.