REVIEW ARTICLE

USING FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT TO HELP ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS: A REVIEW ARTICLE

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ABSTRACT

Assessment is the process of gathering data. The data provide a picture of a range of activities using different forms of assessment such as: pre-tests, observations, and examinations. Once these data are gathered, you can then evaluate the student's performance. Evaluation, therefore, draws on one's judgment to determine the overall value of an outcome based on the assessed data. It is in the decision-making process then, where we design ways to improve the recognized weaknesses, gaps, or deficiencies. The importance of documenting and analyzing students' daily language experiences is not a new concept to teachers. Even as new parents we are constantly evaluating our own children's language output and comparing what they say and do with language to the week before or the day before; we are continually aware of how much or how little they are learning once they start uttering words. Using formative assessment gives teachers a better understanding of their students' language and content understanding that is not provided by standardized summative assessments, which typically can't account for the language proficiency level an English language learner (ELL) has or the quality of his or her content instruction. As part of formative assessment practices, classroom teachers should consider using the following strategies to gauge students' progress in both content and language: Observations of student language usage in speaking and writing, use of visuals to represent conceptual understanding, questioning: What types of questions do students ask about content and how they use language? observation checklists, student demonstrations and student participation in critical dialogues or conversations.

INTRODUCTION

Assessment is the process of gathering data. The data provide a picture of a range of activities using different forms of assessment such as: pre-tests, observations, and examinations. Once these data are gathered, you can then evaluate the student's performance. Evaluation, therefore, draws on one's judgment to determine the overall value of an outcome based on the assessed data. It is in the decision-making process then, where we design ways to improve the recognized weaknesses, gaps, or deficiencies. With the implementation of the Common Core State Standards, formative assessment becomes an even more valuable tool for student success. With the slogan of "higher, clearer, and fewer," the developers of the Common Core are hoping to better prepare students for college or career pursuits (CCSSO, 2010). Further, the end-of-year summative assessments being developed for Common Core standards contain performance tasks, so that our students must apply the content they learn beyond a simple recitation of facts. With the additional intellectual demands on students, it becomes vital that teachers provide feedback and check on student progress towards these standards, and that these formative measures align with summative assessments. The importance of documenting and analyzing students' daily language experiences is not a new concept to teachers.

Even as new parents we are constantly evaluating our own children's language output and comparing what they say and do with language to the week before or the day before; we are continually aware of how much or how little they are learning once they start uttering words. Using formative assessment gives teachers a better understanding of their students' language and content understanding that is not provided by standardized summative assessments, which typically can't account for the language proficiency level an English language learner (ELL) has or the quality of his or her content instruction. For the Common Core math standards, which were designed for coherence within and across grades by focusing on key concepts, teachers can use formative assessments as a way to check on students' progress at key points along the way to ensure students build a solid conceptual foundation, procedural skills and fluency, and have the opportunities to apply that knowledge to solve problems in and even outside the math classroom.

Concept of formative assessment

What is formative assessment?

Formative assessment is an active and intentional learning process that partners, the teacher and the students to

continuously and systematically gather evidence of learning with the express goal of improving student achievement. Formative assessment has been interpreted in many ways. Black and Wiliam (1998) define it as the whole activities undertaken by teachers, and/or by their students, which provide information that can be used as feedback to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged. Formative assessment can be used to facilitate the learning process in the classroom, and it might help the students in their learning. Tahir, Tariq, Mubashira and Rabbia (2012) state that formative assessment is a diagnostic use of assessment that provides feedback to teachers and students throughout instructions. Marsh (2007) claims that formative testing is a kind of strategies, which is designed to identify learner's learning difficulties in order to provide remediation procedures to enhance the performance of the majority of students. The information provided to the students must be used in order for the assessment to be described as a formative one. The Assessment Reform Group (ARG) describes formative assessment as the process of looking for and interpreting evidence for teachers and their learners to decide where the learners fit in their learning, where they need to go, and how best to get there (Assessment Reform Group, 2007). Kathy (2013) also claims that formative testing aims for an analysis of learners' learning difficulties to improve their academic achievement. Assessment in intentional learning refers to cognitive processes that have learning as a goal rather than an incidental outcome (Bereiter and Scardamalia, 1989).

- The use of formative assessment to provide feedback to teachers and students in the course of learning.
- Information gained through informal assessments provides opportunities for teachers to make adjustments to the ways in which they deliver instruction.
- For example, they may re-teach a concept, use alternative instructional approaches, or offer more opportunities for practice and reinforcement.
- Teachers use formative assessments both to provide feedback to students about their progress and to guide decisions about next steps in the learning process, thereby closing the gap between the learner's current and desired states.
- Formative assessment provides feedback and information during the instructional process, while learning is taking place, and while learning is occurring.
- Formative assessment measures student progress but it can also assess your own progress as an instructor.
- A primary focus of formative assessment is to identify areas that may need improvement.
- These assessments typically are not graded and act as a gauge to students' learning progress and to determine teaching effectiveness (implementing appropriate methods and activities).
- Formative assessment information can come from questioning and discussion with students, from their work (quizzes, assignments, homework), or from direct observation of students doing their work.
- Formative assessment is more valuable for day-to-day teaching when it is used to adapt the teaching to meet students' needs.
- Formative assessment helps teachers to monitor their students' progress and to modify the instruction accordingly.
- It also helps students to monitor their own progress as they get feedback from their peers and the teacher.

- Students also find opportunity to revise and refine their thinking by means of formative assessment.
- It is also called as educative assessment and classroom assessment.

Generally formative assessment

- Requires students to take responsibility for their own learning.
- Communicates clear, specific learning goals.
- Focuses on goals that represent valuable educational outcomes with applicability beyond the learning context.
- Identifies the student's current knowledge/skills and the necessary steps for reaching the desired goals.
- Requires development of plans for attaining the desired goals.
- Encourages students to self-monitor progress toward the learning goals.
- Provides frequent assessment, including peer and student self-assessment and assessment embedded within learning activities.
- Includes feedback that is non-evaluative, specific, timely, and related to the learning goals.
- Provides opportunities for the student to revise and improve work products and deepen understandings.
- Promotes metacognition and reflection by students on their work.

The following are a few examples of formative assessments

- Questions that teachers pose to individual students and groups of students during the learning process to determine what specific concepts or skills they may be having trouble with.
- A wide variety of intentional questioning strategies may be employed, such as phrasing questions in specific ways to elicit more useful responses.
- Specific, detailed, and constructive feedback that teachers provide on student work, such as journal entries, essays, worksheets, research papers, projects, ungraded quizzes, lab results, or works of art, design, and performance.

Purposes of formative assessment

- The primary purpose of formative assessment is to improve learning, not merely to audit it.
- It is assessment for learning rather than assessment of learning. In other words it is *not* used for grading.
- Students need and deserve an opportunity to learn before they are graded on how well they have learned.
- Formative assessment is used before instruction, to find out where students are, and during instruction, to find out how they are progressing.
- It typically involves qualitative feedback (rather than scores) for both student and teacher that focuses on the details of content and performance.
- The fact that the results of formative assessment are not used for grading.
- Formative assessment includes diagnostic testing, to identify problems of teaching process.
- It even more useful for learning, especially for less-able students.

Differences between Formative and Summative Assessment

Assessment is vital to the education process. Schools, universities and Ministries or departments of education may use summative assessments and evaluations. In addition, assessment may also serve a formative function. In classrooms, formative assessment refers to frequent, interactive assessments of student's progress and understanding to identify learners' needs and adjust teaching appropriately. "Teachers using formative assessment approaches and techniques are better prepared to meet diverse students' needs". (Burner, 1996) Formative assessment methods are necessary to raise overall levels of student's achievement. Quantitative and qualitative research on formative assessment are proved as one of the most important interventions for promoting high-performance ever studied. Black and Wiliam(1998) concluded that: formative assessment does improve learning. The gains in achievement appear to be quite considerable, and as noted earlier, among the largest ever reported for educational interventions. As an illustration of just how big these gains are, an effect size of 0.7, if it could be achieved on a nation-wide scale, would be equivalent to raising the mathematics attainment score of an 'average' country like England, New Zealand or the United States into the 'top five' after the Pacific Rim countries of Singapore, Korea, Japan and Hong Kong. These findings provide a strong foundation for further research on effective teaching, learning and assessment strategies. On the other hand, the aim of the summative assessment is usually focus on evaluating students' learning at the end of instructional units, lessons, or course specifications and syllables. It is frequently comparing it against some particular test specifications or standard checklists. Consequently, Summative assessments are often considered to be a high stakes form of assessment, which means it been recognized as a "high point value assessment". Some examples of summative assessments include; final or midterm exams, graduation projects, scientific papers or writing compositions. Generally, gathered information from summative assessments has a profound influence on students' development or faculty members to reflect on their own teaching in the future.

Strategies to gauge students' progress in both content and language

As part of formative assessment practices, classroom teachers should consider using the following strategies to gauge students' progress in both content and language:

- Observations of student language usage in speaking and writing
- Use of visuals to represent conceptual understanding
- Questioning: What types of questions do students ask about content and how they use language?
- Observation checklists
- Student demonstrations
- Student participation in critical dialogues or conversations
- Student interviews
- Student work samples
- Student self-reflections
- Games: Can they participate in classroom games, and how much language or visual support do they need to participate?
- Journals

- Think-pair-share activity
- Picture interpretation
- Ability to use graphic organizers to compile ideas
- Note taking

What type of ongoing assessments do you use to gather information about your English language learners?

Heritage (2012) explains that "formative assessment is not a test, nor an instrument, but rather an approach to teaching and learning that uses feedback as its centerpiece in a supportive classroom context." Providing feedback and redirection to students is the best type of tool teachers have in helping English language learners advance their literacy development to meet the Common Core literacy demands—by giving teachers opportunities to help students access the academic content in the classroom.

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