



LEARNING POINT

What are adjustments to teaching?

In the formative assessment process, teachers gather evidence of student understanding to move student learning forward. As teachers plan for instruction, they consider when they will elicit evidence of student understanding and what mechanisms they will use to do so. They anticipate the types of misunderstanding students might evidence and even how they may need to adjust their instruction to move student learning forward.

Teachers elicit evidence in a variety of ways such as observation, student work products, or classroom talk.



After they intentionally collect evidence to figure out students' current levels of understanding relative to learning goals (see the Learning Point, *What is gathering evidence of student understanding?*), teachers use the evidence to decide the next immediate step to advance student learning.

Formative assessment is a systematic process to continuously gather evidence about learning. The data are used to identify a student's current level of learning and to adapt lessons to help the student reach the desired learning goal.

Margaret Heritage, 2007, p. 141

Dylan Wiliam (2009) describes the two steps involved in making instructional decisions:

- 1) **diagnostic**, in which the teacher interprets the students' responses to understand the students' current thinking and motivation; and
- 2) **prognostic**, to choose the best course of action.

Eliciting and using evidence of student understanding should happen during daily teaching and learning in the classroom. The ways that teachers respond to evidence to move student learning forward can look different depending upon the context. Teachers benefit from seeing different examples and then reflecting how it will look in their own setting.

Adjustments to teaching defined

Adjustments to teaching can be defined as the ongoing changes that teachers make to adjust teaching and learning based on evidence in order

to improve students' achievement of intended instructional aims.

Applications to practice

In adjustments to teaching, the teacher uses evidence of student understanding in relation to learning targets to verify or modify teaching and learning activities. After teachers interpret the evidence and identify the current status of student learning, they need to make decisions and take action to respond to students' learning needs.

To support students in reaching learning targets, the teacher may make adjustments in 1) plans for the lesson, 2) instructional strategies, or 3) types of assessment to gather further information on what students know or do not understand. These adjustments may occur during planned work time or moment-to-moment in the classroom, when the teacher continually interprets evidence to guide instructional decisions.

The following are instructional adjustments teachers can make in response to evidence:

Feedback

Feedback to students that is specific to the learning target and success criteria (that is, feedback that is formative, not evaluative). The teacher helps students to reflect on their use of strategies and provides feedback that invites students to be investigators in their learning as they develop new learning strategies.

Modeling

Explicit and intentional modeling of a skill, problem solving, or learning strategy that can help students to understand the desired student learning outcome.

Questioning

Asking questions that can promote meaningful discussions and deepen student understanding. Teachers can listen to the students' answers and ask follow-up questions to gather further information about student understanding. An appropriate instructional response to move learning forward may be to ask further questions.

Direct instruction

Explanation, direction, or instruction that is aimed at supporting students to remove barriers or misconceptions and to provide what students need to deepen their understanding. The teacher may provide an explanation to clarify concepts, clear up misconceptions, or explain a strategy or process. Direct instruction provides students with information intended to help students further develop their understanding.

Contingent plan

A plan that is made before instruction to address the range of possible evidence the teacher may see in a lesson. The teacher considers different ways the students may respond and plans alternate instructional strategies for individuals, small groups, or the whole class that will move learning forward. This allows the teacher to plan for a range of next steps to respond to evidence that might arise in the moment during the lesson.

Work configuration

Evidence-based decisions to have students work in different configurations—alone, in pairs, with an assistant teacher, with the teacher, in small groups, with different resources, or on a subset of expanded content. The intention is to provide opportunities to deepen, extend, or clarify their understanding relevant to the learning target.

Adjustments to teaching are based on the ongoing analysis of teaching and learning throughout the formative assessment process. At times, a single data source will lead to a shift in instructional decisions. At other times, multiple sources of data might be used to make well-informed decisions about next steps in learning.

The teacher may reflect on notes from observations, student work samples, and a student-led conference form to record where students currently are in their learning and to identify learning needs and next steps for instruction. During the lesson, the teacher may also reflect on responses from students to various questions to make adjustments in how to proceed.

Teachers may choose different approaches and systems to analyze

data such as to graph, chart, or color-code student data to identify patterns and have a visual representation of information. A clear purpose and progress toward the learning goal guides the collection, analysis, and reflection on the data.

References

Heritage, M. (2007). *Formative assessment: What do teachers need to know and do?* Phi Delta Kappan, 89(2), 140-146

William, D. (2009). *Assessment for learning: Why, what and how?* London: The Institute of Education, University of London.

TO LEARN MORE

Formative assessment: What do teachers need to know and do?

Margaret Heritage. Phi Delta Kappan, 89(2), 140–146.
www.pdkmembers.org/members_online/publications/Archive/pdf/k0710her.pdf

What do we mean by formative assessment?

Learning Point (Michigan Assessment Consortium, 2016).
bit.ly/LP-FormativeAssessment

The Michigan Assessment Consortium's Assessment Learning Network (ALN) is a professional learning community consisting of members from MI's professional education organizations; the goal of the ALN is to increase the assessment literacy of all of Michigan's professional educators.