Using Formative Assessments to Support ELL Learning

Educator designs formative assessments to support ELL student growth in the understanding and application of language and/or content skills

**Key Method**

The educator determines what concepts and/or skills are necessary to measure and create formative assessments that are differentiated for various English language proficiency levels. The educator reflects on the data gathered from these informal assessments to monitor student growth toward proficiency and decide when students have mastered the concept or skill or when it is appropriate to provide additional instruction, practice, and support.

**Method Components**

Educator understands that formative assessment is a timely and essential tool for monitoring progress toward mastery of content and/or language skills. Content area educators or specialists who work with ELLs also recognize that formative assessments have the potential to be personalized for varying levels of English language proficiency (ELP), which can allow students to demonstrate competency of a concept or skill without also having to demonstrate language mastery. Educators who show competency in designing formative assessments also utilize specific methods for analyzing the data these assessments produce and reflecting on what that data reveals about next steps in instruction.

**Key Elements of Formative Assessment of ELLs:**

- Formative assessments for ELLs should be valid and reliable.
- Valid assessments are appropriate for a specific purpose (e.g., a math assessment that is linguistically difficult may assess a student’s language skill even if it is not intended to and is not a valid assessment of math skill). Educators should be clear about what the assessment is being used to measure: content, language, or both.
- A reliable assessment should allow students to receive the same score no matter where they take the assessment.
- When creating formative assessments for ELLs, educators should avoid cultural bias and be aware of language demands and/or unique needs of their student population (i.e. dual-identified, early learners, long-term ELLs).
- Formative assessments for ELLs must capture data for distinct skills. Skills should be determined from ELP standards or content standards.
- If an assessment is assessing content only for ELLs, modifications should be made to decrease the language demands of the task.
- Formative assessments should be given according the same structure and/or over the same content as classroom instruction.
- Modifications and/or supports for ELLs should be used both during assessment and instruction.
- Formative assessments must be timely. Data from these assessments should be used to help students and educators monitor growth toward larger learning targets.
- Formative assessments do not need to be comprehensive. They are a “dipstick” measurement tool for monitoring progress prior to a summative assessment.

**Supporting Research**

  (Teacher-based assessment (TBA) is increasingly being promoted in educational policies internationally, with English language teachers being called on to plan and/or implement appropriate assessment procedures to monitor and evaluate student progress in their own classrooms. However, there has been a lack of theoretical development of TBA in the English language teaching field, with researchers pointing to significant variability, the absence of systematic principles and procedures, and a reliance on traditional, but now outdated, psychometric assumptions. This article provides an overview of some of the current issues in TBA, including its definition and key characteristics, and the complex but significant questions which its implementation poses for our understanding of language, learning, and assessment.)


Noyce, P., & Hickey, D. T. (2011). New frontiers in formative assessment. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press. (New Frontiers in Formative Assessment is for educators who want to tap into the power of formative assessment. It showcases ongoing work that pushes the field of formative assessment forward in key ways. Drawn from a variety of classrooms in terms of age level, subject area, and use of technology, this book highlights the importance of context in developing effective formative assessment practices. At the same time, it addresses the common elements of a successful formative assessment project—namely, a high level of interest in the project, manageability, impact, and validity—as well as some common barriers to implementation. Taken together, these projects illustrate the journey from assessment of learning to assessment for learning—and ultimately toward assessment as learning.)


Resources

- Sample Formative Assessment Strategies:
  Data Driven Instruction
  https://www.engageny.org/dli-library

- Claremont Immersion School in Arlington, Virginia

- Formative Assessment Processes:

Submission Guidelines & Evaluation Criteria

To earn the micro-credential you must receive a “Passing” evaluation for Parts 1 and 3, and a “Proficient” for each artifact in Part 2.

Part 1. Overview Questions
400 word limit
Please answer the following questions:
- Describe your classroom demographics and content instructional goals. How is formative assessment an essential part of your practice? How do you meet the specific needs of your ELL population?
- What specific theories or practices do you use to design formative assessments for ELLs (e.g., SIOP, Frayer, etc.)? Why are these theories effective?

- Passing: Educator completely answers questions using personal examples and supporting evidence that clearly illustrates research-based practice for the intentional use of data gathered from formative assessment.

Part 2. Work Examples / Artifacts
To earn this micro-credential, please submit the following artifacts for evaluation:
- Create a set of criteria for evaluating formative assessments for ELL students. Use the criteria to evaluate a formative assessment.
- Write a brief analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the assessment,
- Write a brief explanation of how you will modify it to better assess your ELLs. (400-word limit)

- Design a **formative assessment** process for your ELL students and implement it in your classroom. Create a portfolio of evidence gathered during your process. **Your portfolio should include:**
  - A minimum of 200 words describing the assessment goal.
  - A sample assessment (this can be a video of you implementing the assessment, a copy of a paper and pencil assessment, or a written explanation of the strategy used).
  - A maximum of 200 words explaining modifications and/or accommodations used.
  - A maximum of 200 words analyzing student learning based on the assessment results.
  - A maximum of 200 words explaining next steps.

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<th>Rubric and Assessment Review</th>
<th>Educator-created criteria explicitly demonstrates educator ability to analyze assessments for strengths and weakness and specifically addresses unique ELL assessment needs (e.g., awareness of cultural and language bias, etc.)</th>
<th>Educator-created criteria demonstrates educator ability to analyze assessments for strengths and weakness, but response may not address specific ELL assessment needs (e.g., awareness of cultural and language bias, etc.)</th>
<th>Educator-created criteria does not demonstrate educator ability to analyze assessments for strengths and weaknesses and demonstrates a lack of knowledge of unique ELL assessment needs</th>
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<td>Educator modifications to assessment are specific to student needs, based on expert theories, and demonstrate a clear understanding of the correlation between ELL needs and assessment goals</td>
<td>Educator modifications to assessment may be specific to student needs OR based on expert theories OR demonstrate a clear understanding of the correlation between ELL needs and assessment goals, but do not cover all of these needs</td>
<td>Educator modifications to assessment are not specific to student needs, lack connection to expert theories, and show a lack of understanding of the correlation between ELL needs and assessment goals</td>
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| Formative Assessment Process | Portfolio is proficient if all of the following are met:  
- Assessment goal is articulated in such a way that it is clear whether educator is measuring language skills, content skills, or both  
- Sample assessment explicitly meets the assessment goals  
- Modifications and/or accommodations are based on student need and expert theories  
- Analysis of student results demonstrates educator ability to interpret data  
- Plan for next steps clearly stems from assessment data and demonstrates educator ability to utilize formative assessments as a part of cyclical teaching processes | Portfolio is basic if 3-4 of the following are met:  
- Assessment goal is articulated in such a way that it is clear whether educator is measuring language skills, content skills, or both  
- Sample assessment explicitly meets the assessment goals  
- Modifications and/or accommodations are based on student need and expert theories  
- Analysis of student results demonstrates educator ability to interpret data  
- Plan for next steps clearly stems from assessment data and demonstrate educator ability to utilize formative assessments as a part of cyclical teaching processes | Portfolio is developing if 1-2 of the following are met:  
- Assessment goal is articulated in such a way that it is clear whether educator is measuring language skills, content skills, or both  
- Sample assessment explicitly meets the assessment goals  
- Modifications and/or accommodations are based on student need and expert theories  
- Analysis of student results demonstrates educator ability to interpret data  
- Plan for next steps clearly stems from assessment data and demonstrate educator ability to utilize formative assessments as a part of cyclical teaching processes |
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Reflection
400 word limit
Reflect on using formative assessments to support ELL students using the following guided questions:

What did you learn about your ELL students in your formative assessment process? What do you hope to accomplish with your next steps? How has your thinking about the use of formative assessment with ELLs changed or been enhanced by this process?

- **Passing:** Response utilizes specific details from the formative assessment process and provides concrete evidence of reflective practice and clear next steps for ELL instruction based on data gathered. Writing is organized and easy to understand.

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