THE COMPLEXITY OF ASSESSMENT

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Assessment in education is a complex and multifaceted system that serves many different functions. Through an educator lens, the use of assessment is critical for creating effective cycles of instruction and intervention for all students. Assessment provides essential information to guide instructional decision making for building on students' assets toward conceptual understanding. So how do educators find the balance within this complex system to meet the needs of all students?

There are two lenses to consider when examining the purpose of assessment. Assessment **_of_** learning and assessment **_for_** learning. Assessment of learning is often aligned with summative assessments - what students do at the end of a unit of study or on benchmark assessments. Assessment of learning often comes with a score or grade toward proficiency on global outcomes. Assessment for learning is associated with timely informative goal posts along the progression or trajectory toward mastery. Assessments for learning are the formative tasks that allow educators to interact with student understanding, process with students, provide timely constructive feedback during learning, and plan for instructional next steps to ensure consistent progress toward conceptual understanding. Assessments for learning also include the key components of students as active participants in their learning experiences through self-reflection and personal goal setting throughout the learning process.

Three of the biggest questions often asked about assessments are:
- How do you manage all of the assessments?
- Which assessments give the most actionable data for instruction at the classroom level and student level?
  - What are effective formative assessments?

Answering these questions is possible when time is spent understanding each assessment and recognizing the difference in purpose between more global snapshots (summative - of learning) vs. actionable data (formative - for learning).

Managing assessment, for many school systems, is designed through a local assessment plan that spaces out district and state/national level assessment requirements that all students are responsible for taking three times a school year. These assessments are often the helicopter view as they are used to evaluate global outcomes and aggregate larger scale student data at the classroom, grade, school and district level to measure growth toward end of year proficiency. Some of these assessments are also used as screening tools to identify students educators may want to gather more information about to ensure their academic needs are being met. The cautionary tale with these assessments is that they can lead to grouping and classifying students based on numbers and scores, not concepts or skills.

Managing the array of assessments from a teacher perspective is about finding the story lines and threads within the assessment. Assessments of learning are often hard to use at the student level due to, in many cases, the online nature of the assessment. While there is a place for this type of assessment it doesn't often inform our next instructional steps at the student or small group level. Because these assessments do not show student thinking, often other than right and wrong answers or aggregate results, they cannot be effectively used to respond or plan for small group instruction. With the rapid growth of computer based adaptive assessments teachers are losing access to student thinking. Assessments *of* learning **can** be used to identify trends in layer one content and speak to the need for distributed practice of critical concepts in first instruction or during a Math Menu practice to provide additional practice with High Leverage Concepts (HLCs) from previous goal posts along the HLC Progressions. Further, many online assessment systems allow educators to disaggregate data to the standard level by student or class. Educators can follow these threads to find global trends and gaps in foundational skills. Applying this knowledge to Math Menu choices allows the educator to gather usable formative data and student thinking to more accurately identify and create strengths based goals for all students.

Actionable data, assessment *for* learning, is humanizing and valuable. It is the data that allows educators to understand what students are thinking about a particular concept. Assessment for learning provides evidence of student assets and helps determine potential next steps. Critically, assessment for learning allows educators to evaluate skills and concepts, not students as 'high' or 'low.' There are a multitude of formative options that humanize data to help educators support all students.

Effective formative assessments are any piece of student work or discourse that allows insight into student thinking and understanding of a math idea. While there are

common types of formative assessments like exit tickets and program created mid unit check points, there are other highly effective options that allow assessment to be embedded into daily routines throughout the math block. One critical example of formative assessment is student problem solving. Collecting daily student problem solving, from Main Lesson or Math Menu, that shows their self-selected models and strategies (you may have to take pictures or videos of concrete models and strategies) is essential in creating timely next instructional steps at the individual, small group and layer one level of your MTSS. Using the HLC Assessments or Concrete, Representational, Abstract (CRA) assessments are another valuable option for examining the models and strategies students are applying to rich problem solving. Another embedded form of formative assessment is collecting daily anecdotal observations. This formative assessment strategy requires a dynamic documentation system. Documenting anecdotal or observational data takes practice and commitment to habitualize. Ways to apply this system in your practice are to record notes: I saw (name) say or do (capture their words, models and strategies) or take pictures or videos to document student ideas. This system allows educators to capture one on one conference notes, student to student discourse, and idea sharing during Launch or number sense routines. Observational data systems also enhance an educators ability to monitor student thinking during independent work times in main lesson or Math Menu providing opportunity to plan immediate response to student learning.

The complexity of assessment can be daunting and overwhelming. When educators can sort and separate assessments based on their purpose - of learning or for learning - they become empowered to humanize data and utilize it to understand student thinking and plan impactful strengths-based next steps for all students.

What Now? Scan the QR code and scroll to the bottom of the post for links to next steps

1. Check out our High Leverage Concepts Resources including HLC Assessments and HLC Learning Progressions.
2. Read our blog "The Five Key Components for Unlocking Math Progress" to learn more about how we use assessments to determine next instructional steps.
3. Bring All Learners Network (ALN) into your school or district for embedded professional development.