

Assessment to Improve Teaching and Learning

Scott Marion

smarion@nciea.org

Center for Assessment

CCSSO-Large Scale Assessment Conference

San Francisco, CA

June 26, 2006



Session overview

- I'm going to present some introductory information about formative and classroom assessment
- Jane will present the details about how teachers use a variety of classroom/formative assessments made available to them
- Nikki will describe key issues of a district trying to implement such strategies



The “New” Hot Topic

- Although many of us have been working on small scale/classroom assessment issues for years, there has been a rapid increase in interest in any intervention that can improve performance on end-of-year tests
 - Look at this program
 - Boulder CCSSO summer conference
 - FAST SCASS
- While we don't think that increasing end-of-year test scores is the right reason for pursuing formative assessment strategies, it has been documented as one of the most powerful interventions studied...if done right!



What is Formative Assessment?

- The language has gotten tricky and the terms, as Shepard notes, have been “hijacked”, but formative assessments are those activities designed to provide feedback in order to improve the teaching-learning interaction
- It is really about use...
- It could be more helpful to think of formative assessment as an instructional/learning activity rather than an assessment activity
- Do assessments (e.g., “benchmark tests”) used to evaluate programs count as “formative”?
 - Perhaps yes, but for our discussion, we are focusing on information used to make inside-the-classroom decisions



Why Formative Assessment?

- Enables students to learn to monitor and adjust their own learning
- Allows teachers to learn more about both student learning and meaningful content
- Provides teachers with information to tailor instruction for groups of students or even individual students
- These features can serve as criteria to evaluate the effectiveness of formative assessment programs



Key Features

- Represents important content and skills
- Placed strategically in a learning progression
 - Some argue whether it should be cognitively or socioculturally based, but there are enough overlapping features to support a shared perspective
- Provides targeted feedback about specific aspects of performance



Learning Progressions

- Are not linear
- Might best be represented by complex models such as schema indicating that progress could be the development of richer understanding of a set of concepts rather than simply accumulating more concepts
- Are rarely embodied in state content standards—this is a major concern!



The Role of Curriculum

- There is an active debate within the formative assessment community regarding the degree to which formative assessment activities need to be embedded in rich curriculum
 - Some argue that formative assessment can be used to improve teaching and learning regardless of curriculum context
 - Others state quite strongly that for several reasons, formative assessments must be embedded in curriculum



Classroom Assessment Systems

- Are classroom assessment and formative assessment synonymous?
- As most of you know, the answer is NO!
- A comprehensive classroom assessment system embodies much more than formative assessment activities
 - but classroom assessment systems should be conceptually-consistent with the goals of formative assessment
- Classroom assessment systems are tied to both content standards and specific curricular programs. The relationship between these two sets of learning goals is critical.



Vision for Standards-based Classrooms

- In successful standards-based classrooms, teachers consistently link instruction with standards, student learning, and assessment.
 - ✓ Instruction, assessment, and learning are focused on content and performance standards
 - ✓ Instruction and assessment are integrated
 - ✓ Instruction and assessment are informed and adjusted by documented evidence of student learning



Goals of Classroom-Based Assessment Systems

- Report valid information to parents and the public
- Pursue ongoing curriculum development and other instructional decisions
- Should broaden assessment possibilities (beyond what's possible in a large-scale assessment)
- *Should involve students as active participants*
- *Help teachers learn more about how children develop as learners*



Key Features of a Classroom-based Assessment Program

- Assessment addresses the learning experiences in which students are engaged
- Classroom assessment procedures should describe clearly and accurately how students do on multiple samples tasks over an extended period of time
- Students are active participants



Key Features of a Classroom-based Assessment Program (continued)

- An assessment program should be multifaceted-should focus on achievement, process, and quality of self-assessment
- Should include formative assessments as continuous and inseparable from instruction
- A yearly assessment plan should guide the timing and use of a variety of assessment procedures
- These assessments should work together to form a composite evaluation or grade



Key Features of a Classroom-based Assessment Program (continued)

- Assessment strengthens teachers' and students' knowledge.
 - Teachers and students should grow in their ability to make insightful analyses from the data gathered.
- Record keeping and collections of work samples by both teachers and students provide the systematic information that facilitates communication.



Professional Learning

- We are asking for assessment and instructional actions that go far beyond how most teachers have been prepared
- But it is not just teachers who have to learn...
 - School leadership is key to supporting meaningful assessment and learning in classrooms
 - District and state leaders must direct resources—broadly speaking—to ensure that schools are able to implement these programs with high degree of fidelity



Assessment Literacy?

- This term gets used often to capture the professional development needs
- Many are now pushing for increasing instructional literacy
 - Pedagogical content knowledge
 - How people learn
 - Deep understanding of content
- And yes, they need to learn how to select/create meaningful assessment activities
- But is that enough...
 - No, I and others would argue that teachers need practice (with modeling) with looking at and learning from student work...



Assessment-instruction interaction

- What is the mechanism for turning an assessment result—broadly speaking—into a useful instructional action?
 - What form do the data need to be in to facilitate this translation (e.g., scored item responses, actual student work, teacher observations and reflections on student performance)?
 - If the data must be student work, does that limit the scalability?
- How do cognitive and sociocultural conceptions help us better understand this interaction?
- Do different types of formative assessment design promote increases in teacher knowledge compared with other designs?



- We are working and will be working to answer these questions
- Jane and Nikki will discuss a program that might help us get at some of these answers

