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Title: Tasting the assessment soup: Making formative use of summative assessment

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Introduction

"When the cook tastes the soup, that's formative assessment; when the customer tastes the soup, that's summative assessment."

David Hopkins (OCED Conference, 2006)

Formative assessments are commonly assumed to be *for* learning when teachers use the results to modify and improve learning and teaching strategies, while summative assessments are said to be *of* learning because they evaluate academic achievement at the end of an instructional period.

The Education Bureau has been promoting 'Assessment for Learning' since the implementation of the Curriculum Reform initiatives in 2000. It has been interpreted in many ways by different people.

Classroom assessment is a kind of formative assessment practices, calling for deep changes in teachers' perception of their role in relation to their students' learning and classroom practices. It can help teachers find out what students are learning and how well they are learning.

Improving learning through assessment depends on key factors, including effective feedback (to and from students), active involvement and engagement of students in learning, and most importantly, adjusting teaching to take account of the results of assessment. The teacher, like the chef, will need to sample the soup to see if it needs more salt or pepper. That is to say, there is a need to modify learning and teaching strategies to suit the needs of the students. Focusing on learning the skills and understanding has the advantage of making it more likely that students will be able to transfer their learning from one context to another.

Formative use of summative assessments to make an impact on learning

In this sharing, teachers from different schools with different contexts (e.g. school backgrounds and student intake) will demonstrate how they make use of data from assessment to inform learning. One school will show how they modify their learning and teaching strategies with regard to the weaknesses of students identified in their TSA item

analysis, subsequently permeating reading strategies such as inference skills, interpretation of unfamiliar words, identification of main ideas etc. into regular teaching. Another school makes use of specific test and examination results to draw up remediation plans to help weak students improve. The curriculum co-ordinator in the last school will tell how they give administrative support to teachers in modifying learning and teaching with reference to the analysis of student performance as reflected in classroom assessment from lesson observation. These school cases illustrate that formative 'exploitation' of summative assessment practices, if used persistently and consistently, results in improvement in student achievement. In the process, the schools have considered the following dos and don'ts of how assessments are to be used.

Dos

- Evaluate internal and public assessments to adjust learning and teaching
- Play down the competitiveness of grading
- Observe how students learn through the following
 - effective questioning in terms of wait time, quality of questions and use of wrong answers to develop understanding;
 - enhanced feedback to follow up on students' response and indicate improvement; and
 - active engagement in the learning process.

Don'ts

- Over-emphasise the use of giving grades at the expense of helping students to overcome learning difficulties
- Concern merely the administrative function of testing and record-keeping, rather than building students' self-esteem