

Part I: Purpose and Goals

Purpose: Changing of the Guard

The overriding purpose of this little In a Nutshell book, *Informative Assessment: When It's Not About a Grade*, is to provide a research-based, teacher-friendly resource. This valuable book features a spectrum of formative assessment tools and techniques to help the teacher assess student work and academic progress in an ongoing, continuous, and consistent manner.

It's a given that academic assessments inform. What is not as obvious is whether that information is received early enough and then utilized judiciously to guide and enhance instruction. That, in essence, is the fundamental difference between traditional views of assessment and the emergent view of the current formative assessment.

The key to this at-a-glance guide is to demonstrate how these many tools and techniques are available for assessment purposes, as well as for quality instruction.

One might think about the informative assessment piece in this paradoxical view: Instructional practices often serve as assessment practices. Assessment practices often serve as instructional practices. Or, put more succinctly, instruction is assessment; assessment is instruction. The two are intertwined within the complexities of the quality K–12 classroom.

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Chapter 1

Routine Informative Assessments

Every Day—Flow

SCENARIO (Reader’s Theater)

All Day, Every Day!

The scene is Star Middle School, with a new teacher, Ms. Juarez, and a veteran teacher, Mr. Brant. This is taking place during their lunch break, and they are talking about a math lesson that had occurred earlier that morning. Their discussion centers on student involvement and feedback during a lesson in Ms. Juarez’s class.

Ms. Juarez

We just had a great discussion in my geometry class this morning about how to develop proofs for theorems. A couple of students dialogued back and forth for a few minutes and really seemed to understand the key strategies to use. My concern is that the rest of the students were not that engaged. They were attentive and they looked like they were listening, but I really don’t know what they know or what they don’t know.

Mr. Brant

As part and parcel of my lessons, I use a host of strategies to get feedback during those lessons. I want to know if it “takes” or not. I want to know if the kids really get it or if they’re lost. I use a whole array of formative assessments to get that feedback.

Ms. Juarez

Formative assessments? I’m not sure what you mean by that, but I do assess the class after the lesson. I usually use those tests for a grade in the grade book. It gives me a read on where they are on that skill or concept.

Mr. Brant

Well, these kinds of assessment are a little different. They are more like touchbacks, to get immediate feedback during the lesson itself. Formative assessments inform. They are the ways I use to find out if the kids are on track with the lesson or if they need another swing at it.

Ms. Juarez

Oh, I see what you mean. Formative assessments are like check points along the way.

Mr. Brant

That's right. I even call these assessments "informative assessments," rather than formative assessments, to make the point very clear that they are used to inform. In fact, they are not about a grade at all. They are tools and techniques I use all day long, every day, to maximize feedback from students.

Ms. Juarez

That's exactly what I think was missing from the dialogue this morning. It was just between the two kids. While I felt they did have a good understanding of the lesson, I was not sure how everyone else had fared.

Mr. Brant

Exactly! That's my point. We need student feedback, *all day, every day*, to temper our lesson accordingly.

Ms. Juarez

Would you tell me more about this idea of informative assessments if I come by after school? I would love to have some concrete ideas that I could use right away in my classes.

Mr. Brant

Absolutely! Come by after school, and I will show you some tools and techniques I use all of the time. They are part of all of my lessons. In fact, I guess you could say that these assessments are woven into the lessons. The instruction and assessments are seamless. They occur almost simultaneously, with quick checks throughout the lesson, to be sure all the students are on board.



Ms. Juarez

I can't wait to talk more! I'll be down as soon as the kids are gone, today.

Mr. Brant

Okay! I'll get some things together for you. See you later.

Teachings

Defining Routine Informative Assessments

To define the concept of Routine Informative Assessments, it is necessary to unpack the word *routine*. *Routine*, in the context of classroom instruction, means standard things that occur, tactics or strategies, performed with regularity, as part of the day-to-day occurrences. In brief, routine refers to happenings that fit into the scheme of things on a daily basis. All day long, every day of the week, these Routine Informative Assessments occur as an essential part of the lesson or review.

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Routine Informative Assessment is to be interpreted as the daily "activities undertaken by the teachers and/or by their students, which provide information to be used as feedback to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged" (Black & Wiliam, 1998, p. 142).

Describing Routine Informative Assessments

Routinely, these assessment strategies are woven into the daily schedule of instructional events and are inexplicably linked to the instructional tenor of the classroom. They are simple, repetitious assessment strategies, threaded

Ms. Poindexter's Questions

Ms. Poindexter's Questions ask students to review their recent endeavors and evaluate the process. The two questions ask the following:

1. Where did you get stuck?
2. How did you get unstuck?

In posing these two questions, the teacher is asking students to think deeply about their processes and the procedures they employed. In turn, they are expected to examine what was hard to do, and what they did to move things along. In asking for these kinds of reflections, the teacher intentionally implies that everyone gets stuck in the process of doing complex tasks, and that everyone has strategies to find alternative solutions. It becomes a highly effective informative assessment tool that students can take into many of their life situations, as well as apply to many school situations.

Plus, Minus, Interesting (PMI)

Plus, Minus, Interesting, or PMI, is a De Bono (1992) strategy that requires a look at three perspectives: the positive or the pluses, the negatives or minuses, and the neutral or the interesting.

P (Plus) means anything that seems to enhance; the benefits, the good side

M (Minus) targets anything that seems to diminish or take away from; the detriments; the bad side

I (Interesting) focuses on anything that is not really a plus or minus, but rather a connection or thought that seems neutral, yet relevant

Again, PMI implies questions of evaluation and analysis in terms of the many facets of an idea or task. PMI is a reflective tool that has multiple applications.

