

Chapter 2

Empowering Students and Teachers Through Formative Assessment: A Growth–Mindset Model

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, the authors provide a formative assessment model geared toward supporting what Carol Dweck called a growth-mindset. The authors describe the model in detail, then describe an action research study in which they collaborated with public school teachers to put the model to work with high-achieving, second grade students in the context of reading groups. Finally, the authors provide key results from the implementation and make recommendations for practitioners interested in using formative assessment to promote growth-mindset.

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the authors describe an action research study in which they collaborated with public school teachers to implement a formative assessment model with high-achieving, second grade students. Although the study took place in the context of leveled reading groups, the focus of the data collection and analysis was not on reading instruction or assessment. Instead, the goal of the study was specifically to determine whether the formative assessment practices fostered what Carol Dweck (2010) called growth mindset. The authors begin by providing a literature review that defines formative assessment and outlines key features of growth mindset. They then focus on four components of formative assessment

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that facilitate a shift from fixed to growth mindset. The methodology section explains the implementation of those formative assessment components over the 5-week study. The key results of the study are summarized in themes, with emphasis on the implications for classroom practice. Importantly, although the participants in the study were high achieving students, the implications of this work apply more broadly. Consequently, the authors make recommendations for practitioners interested in using formative assessment to promote growth-mindset for all learners.

LITERATURE REVIEW

As Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) noted, since the introduction of No Child Left Behind, teacher and student accountability have been central in discussions about education and improving teaching and learning. “The accountability movement,” they explained, “assumes there is consensus across society about what it means to be educated, whose knowledge and values are of most worth, and what counts as effectiveness” (p. 10). Indeed, the proliferation of standardized assessment is predicated on that very notion. At the same time, the process of learning differs from learner to learner, as it is “embedded in the immediate relationships of students and teachers, shaped by the cultures of schools and communities, and connected to the experiences and biographies of individuals and groups” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 10). Thus, formative assessment can become an essential tool to highlight that “accountability for students’ learning goes far beyond what can be measured on tests” (p. 2). The shift of accountability from standardized assessments that promote fixed mindset to formative assessments that promote growth mindset may enable learners to realize their own personal growth potentials.

Formative Assessment

Formative assessment is a contested term like many others within the field of education. There is a difference of opinion, for instance, about whether formative assessment refers to a specific instrument that diagnoses student understanding and achievement or to a process of monitoring learning-in-progress (Bennett, 2011). Bennett argued that those who take the view that formative assessment is a process often still quibble over whether it is a process for checking in on student understanding, a method of informing instruction, or both. Much more rarely, however, is formative assessment seen as a way to build student self-efficacy through self-evaluation and goal setting. Indeed, self-assessment and peer assessment are often after-thoughts in considering models and purposes of formative assessment, despite how valuable those processes are to all students. Though there is a convincing body of literature that suggests formative assessment can positively impact student achievement, Bennett (2011) is quick to caution that effectiveness of formative assessment relies on implementation. Moreover, no assessment is *only* summative or formative but can be used for different purposes depending on the intention. As Black and Wiliam (2018) noted,

the distinction between formative and summative becomes a distinction in the kinds of inferences being drawn from assessment outcomes. Where the inferences relate to the status of the student, or about their future potential, then the assessment is functioning summatively. Where the inferences relate to the kinds of actions that would best help the student learn, then the assessment is functioning formatively (p. 553).

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