Assessment Block Party Quotes

Below is a list of quotes to use during the assessment block party. These should be cut into individual strips for the block party activity. This handout can be used after the block party to see all the quotes and the citations for each.

To be coherent with formative assessment, a critical requirement is that grades be based on the same learning goals toward which instructional activities and formative feedback are aimed. This may seem obvious, but in fact it is still the case that many classroom quizzes and unit tests rely on formats that make them an impoverished rendition of learning activities. (Shephard et al., 2018)

Rather than sorting students into haves and have-nots, formative assessment can increase access to high-quality science education for all students (National Research Council, 2001; White & Fredericksen, 1998). Formative assessment helps you set challenging learning goals and then provides the mechanism for helping your students get there. By paying very close attention to all students in your classroom and giving feedback to individuals aimed at helping them to reach learning goals, you can actively work to level the playing field for lower-achieving students, English language learners, and special education students in your own classroom. (Furtak, 2009).

School staff have little choice but to balance what states and districts require them to teach with addressing students’ interests and questions, a tension that requires ongoing dialogue among school staff, parents, and students. (Penuel et al., 2015).

Our concern is this: If we allow our desire for textbook correctness to dictate our assessments in every moment, we risk undermining our overarching goal of developing meaningful understanding of science and scientific knowledge by suppressing the reasoning that leads to it. This is not to say that correctness never matters; there are times in the classroom when we want or need students to have correct answers, especially when those answers are prerequisites to further exploration of content. However, we suggest that while textbook correctness is certainly a reasonable overarching goal for science learning, it may often be an inappropriate immediate goal in the classroom. (Russ et al., 2009)

To be consistent with a productive formative assessment culture, grading policies should avoid using points and grades “to motivate” students but should create opportunities for students to use feedback to improve their work. (Shepard et al., 2018)
An absence of measures for gauging successful implementation of science-practice instruction surfaced as a source of ambiguity and uncertainty for teachers. Because assessments of student learning available to teachers measured content and did not adequately measure science and engineering practices, teachers face uncertainty around how to measure student learning...For one of our teachers, a lack of shared views regarding what counted as valid assessment coupled with the district-mandated expectation to assess student learning on a daily basis and track student assessment data proved particularly problematic and significantly foreclosed her sensemaking process. (Allen & Penuel, 2015)

Bennett (2011) offered a succinct summary regarding the controversy surrounding the definition of formative assessment. One camp thinks that “‘formative assessment’ refers to an instrument (e.g., Pearson, 2005), as in a diagnostic test, an ‘interim’ assessment, or an item bank” (p. 6). The other camp, quoting from Popham (2008), holds that “formative assessment is not a test but a process” (p. 6). (Shepard et al., 2018)

For the purposes of classroom teaching and learning we contend that test-format data systems have been given too large a presence in today’s classrooms. This is problematic because both their representation of learning goals and the information they provide are limited, and their use often has negative effects on student identity development and motivation. Our brief argument here, in favor of curriculum-embedded-in-the-process-of-instruction formative assessment, makes two main points, focused first on the usefulness of the “information” provided by assessment activities, and second on the ways that materials and tools support productive, learning-focused “assessment cultural practices.” (Shepard et al., 2018)

The FAST SCASS members define formative assessment as:

- a planned, ongoing process used by all students and teachers during learning and teaching to elicit and use evidence of student learning to improve student understanding of intended disciplinary learning outcomes and support students to become self-directed learners. Effective use of the formative assessment process requires students and teachers to integrate and embed the following practices in a collaborative and respectful classroom environment:
  - clarify learning goals and success criteria within a broader progression of learning;
  - elicit and analyze evidence of student thinking;
  - engage in self-assessment and peer feedback;
  - provide actionable feedback; and
  - use evidence and feedback to move learning forward by adjusting learning strategies, goals, or next instructional steps. (Council of Chief State Science Officers, 2018)

“Learning is more effective when common misconceptions are addressed, exposed, and discussed” (p.8). However, teachers also need a wide range of pedagogical strategies to identify next steps in supporting this kind of student learning, which can be the most challenging part of the formative process (Heritage et al., 2009).
Curriculum developers, assessment developers, and others who create resource materials aligned to the science framework and the Next Generation Science Standards should ensure that assessment activities included in such materials (such as mid- and end-of-chapter activities, suggested tasks for unit assessment, and online activities) require students to engage in practices that demonstrate their understanding of core ideas and crosscutting concepts. These materials should also reflect multiple dimensions of diversity (e.g., by connecting with students’ cultural and linguistic identities). In designing these materials, development teams need to include experts in science, science learning, assessment design, equity and diversity, and science teaching. (NRC, 2014)

Formative assessment is not a linear process, nor a set of discrete steps, rather the practices weave together and influence each other. (Redefining Formative Assessment)

“Formative assessment is a planned, ongoing process used by all students and teachers during learning and teaching to elicit and use evidence of student learning to improve student understanding of intended disciplinary learning outcomes and support students to become self-directed learners.” (National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine, 2018).

Those who view formative assessment as an approach, rather than as formal tests or tasks administered to students, treat it as a process for generating information about where student learning currently is and where it needs to go next to meet a learning goal (National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine, 2018).

Standardized tests, as ‘high stakes tests,’ have been misused over time to deny opportunity and undermine the educational purpose of schools, actions we have never supported and will never condone. But the anti-testing efforts that appear to be growing in states across the nation, like in Colorado and New York, would sabotage important data and rob us of the right to know how our students are faring. When parents ‘opt out’ of tests—even when out of protest for legitimate concerns—they’re not only making a choice for their own child, they’re inadvertently making a choice to undermine efforts to improve schools for every child. (The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, 2015)

Effective feedback provides answers to three main questions for the student (and the teacher): “Where am I going?” “How am I going?” and “Where to next?” (p. 86). Feedback that was effective was coupled with instruction-enhanced learning, whereas feedback that involved praise only was not effective for learning. (National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine, 2018).

One alternative for teachers is to offer “as if” grades, Shepard explained, in which they tell students what grade they would have gotten if what they turned in were a finished product. This can help students “internalize the criteria for good work, which is part of learning.” (Heitin, 2015)
Giving students comments about their work is helpful... but feedback in the form of grades can be discouraging, according to research by Ruth Butler, an education professor at Hebrew University of Jerusalem in Israel, and others. When teachers pair grades with comments, students still focus on the grades and fail to process the meaningful feedback on how to improve. (Heitin, 2015)

Some teachers enter grades for formative assessments, particularly when using an online gradebook, to keep parents and students informed, Pierce said. “In this instance, the scores are for information purposes. They don’t ‘count’ in the final course or unit grade—they’re meant to be feedback on current progress,” she said. “I know that some teachers also enter a grade for a formative assessment, and then replace it with the summative-assessment grade. Again, the grade provides a general sense of progress toward a goal.” (Heitin, 2015)

Grading formative assessment, Filkins said, is akin to ranking basketball teams based on how they do in practice. “If we say this is for practice and we hold you accountable for the practice, then it wasn’t really practice,” he said. “You almost want kids to make mistakes on formative assessments because that’s how you figure out your next teaching cues. Once we attach a grade, students try to hide their weaknesses.” (Heitin, 2015)
References


