

I plan to include a short commentary on formative assessment in our newsletter starting with this issue. I want to start this series by reminding us of the overall approach we should be taking toward formative assessment practices in our work as evaluators. Let's review a few basic points:

- It ***is not appropriate*** to use child scores on formative assessment measures to evaluate teacher performance.
- Using child growth, as demonstrated by formative assessment scores, to evaluate teacher performance ***is not appropriate***.
- Using formative assessment scores to judge teacher performance ***compromises the validity*** of formative child assessment data.

Formative child assessment tools were simply not designed and validated for evaluating teacher performance. Only direct summative child assessments, designed and validated for teacher performance evaluation purposes, are appropriate sources of child data to include in the teacher evaluation process. However, this practice should be reserved for evaluating teachers who serve much older children. Direct summative child assessments for young children are generally not designed and validated for teacher performance evaluation purposes. Direct summative assessments, when used with young children, often lack sufficient reliability, validity, fairness, and cultural sensitivity. Young children do not generally give responses to direct measures that have enough consistency and validity to justify their use for any high stakes purposes. Rather, we all know that we need to observe young children in their natural environment over long periods of time to gain a full and valid understanding of what they know and can do. Therefore, high stakes assessments of any kind are generally considered ***inappropriate*** for use with young children.

So then how do we incorporate the formative assessment process into our work as evaluators? There are several important ways. First, by not ignoring this important component of teaching. Some experts argue that we just shouldn't go there because of the concerns we have already discussed. However, let me remind us that it is not true that the formative assessment process has no place in teacher performance evaluation. Rather, it is the process that we need to focus on, not the scores. Formative assessment is a central component of high quality teaching. Remember that high quality early childhood teaching consists of three important overarching components:

- Knowing child development and *Foundations*, and using that knowledge to create appropriate, individualized ***Instructional Goals*** for each child.
- Planning and intentionally implementing a variety of ***Pedagogical Strategies*** that give each child the best chance to develop and grow into their full potential.
- Using ***Assessment Techniques*** regularly to get to know each child and monitor their development.

So if formative assessment is such a central part of high quality teaching, we as evaluators can learn a great deal about each teacher we serve by examining the quality of their assessment practices. High quality formative assessment practices help teachers:

- Understand **Instructional Goals** in terms of what they can observe children doing in the classroom.
- Set learning targets for children based on data about where children are right now.
- Select the most appropriate **Pedagogical Strategies** to meet the needs of each child.

Formative assessment tools were designed and validated to be resources for teachers. High quality formative assessment measures like GOLD help teachers understand the children and families they serve, identify child strengths and areas needing support, plan and differentiate instruction based on data, and communicate with stakeholders in specific terms that illustrate what children know and can do. The developmental progressions can help curricular goals and standards like *Foundations* come to life for teachers by laying out a sequence of observable child behaviors that represent growth and development. Therefore, we need to remember:

- It **is appropriate** to examine teacher implementation of the formative assessment process.
- It **is appropriate** to focus on formative assessment as part of the teacher performance appraisal process.
- It **is appropriate** to use data about teacher implementation of the formative assessment process as part of the performance evaluation process.

Why is it so important to use data about implementation of the FAP to evaluate teachers? When teachers use the formative assessment process with fidelity, they enhance the growth and development of children. Formative assessment practices are included in every Standard. An evaluator cannot address all of the Standards and Elements without examining evidences of a teacher's formative assessment practices. Finally, when formative assessment data is included in the teacher evaluation and mentoring process, the process is richer and more rewarding for teachers. Even if they resist at first, they will improve the quality of their teaching if we communicate how important assessment is to us.

We all know the NC Teacher Evaluation Process is designed to be a collaborative experience. When implemented with fidelity, performance evaluation is not "done to teachers", but rather "with teachers." So let's all encourage teachers to share their successes with us, not in terms of child assessment scores, but rather in terms of stories about real children that illustrate how teachers used intentional teaching practices to support the growth and development of individual children. We all know that teachers have the responsibility to present evidence and artifacts to their mentors and evaluators. So let's encourage them to include evidences they use to support placements of individual children on GOLD progressions as artifacts that show us the impact of their teaching. As we go forward with this series, we will look at specific parts of the rubric to see just how often formative assessment practices are included in the things we are evaluating.

Thanks again to everyone on our team. We really do have an amazing team of highly qualified mentors and evaluators with a wide range of complementary skills.

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