

A Profound and Lasting Influence

By [Mandy Stalets](#)

July 25, 2016

Have you ever done a quick Google search of the word “formative”? I was inspired when I recently did and read, “serving to form something, especially having a *profound* and *lasting* influence on a person’s development.” What exactly is it that we are trying to *form* through our formative assessment processes? In my classroom, I hope to develop strong, capable learners who take charge of their learning, learn from mistakes, and develop a growth mindset. My hope is that they view assessments as a method of communication between us and see the value in making mistakes and growing from them.

This got me thinking—do my formative assessments have a *profound* and *lasting* influence on my students’ development? What impact are my assessments having on my students? Do they inspire and help create confident learners? When I design assessments, I not only need to make sure that they are designed in a way that will elicit an instructional response, but also how these assessments will have a profound and lasting influence as I attempt to form confident and capable learners?

There is often a negative stigma associated with the word assessment. Traditionally, assessments and grades have been used to punish or sort, and students associate assessment with anxiety and stress. However, based on this definition and sound assessment principles, our assessments should do just the opposite. Formative assessment has the opportunity to be more than data collection or an in-progress check to determine readiness and plan next steps in learning and instruction. Formative assessment should also allow for vulnerability, be a learning opportunity, and help develop confident and capable learners. So how do we change the mindset when it comes to assessment and the feelings it elicits in both teachers and students?

In order to create this feeling of hope and develop that lasting influence on students, it is important that we have students invested in our assessment practices. Nicole Dimich Vagle (2015) describes student investment as “...the extent to which learners are engaged in their learning and able to describe where they are and how they can grow. This type of self-regulation is only possible when students clearly understand what they are trying to achieve, have a sense of what quality work looks like, and can adapt and revise to get closer to the learning goal.” One of the most powerful aspects of our assessment practices is the opportunity to engage students in meaningful dialogue about their learning. Sadler (1998) stressed the importance of students being able to answer: Where am I going? Where am I now? How can I close the gap? Students can become invested when we are mindful about including them in the discussion. Our role as teachers is to help coach and lead them through the learning process. By providing a clear target, providing feedback and redirecting when necessary, and communicating to students the destination and how to get there, we invite them to be active participants in the learning process.

<http://allthingsassessment.info/2016/07/25/a-profound-and-lasting-influence/>

One of the most critical steps in changing the mindset is to make sure that both teachers and students understand that assessments are a form of communication. We need to eliminate the fear of being wrong and instead celebrate mistakes and vulnerability. When our formative assessments are designed as a communication tool, we allow for and welcome that vulnerability. We can allow for creativity and students exploring different paths without the fear of being penalized. It is acceptable to be wrong, and in fact, at the early stages of learning, we expect students to be wrong. After all, as John Dewey said, “We do not learn from experiences...we learn from reflecting on experiences.” I view assessments as a way to individually speak to each of my students. When my feedback is targeted, ongoing, and actionable, it allows students to view their strengths and where they currently are, as well as what their next steps need to be in order to get there. Feedback has been described as the most single powerful moderator that enhances achievement. (Hattie, 1999) With effective feedback, I have the ability to meet each student where they currently are, recognize their strengths, and develop and communicate a plan for improvement.

When this feedback is paired with self-regulation and reflection, we not only help guide student learning, but also involve them in the process. When students are invested in the process, own their learning, and have the ability to reflect and plan next steps, our assessments have the ability to have a *profound* and *lasting* influence on them as learners.

References:

Hattie, J 1999, Influences on Student Learning. Inaugural Lecture: Professor of Education, University of Auckland (downloaded August 2015 from <https://cdn.auckland.ac.nz/assets/education/hattie/docs/influences-on-student-learning.pdf>)

Dimich Vagle, N. (2015). Retrieved from: <http://allthingsassessment.info/student-investment/>