

# Mathematics Assessment

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RESEARCH IN MATHEMATICS EDUCATION



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struggle in making the transition from traditional instruction toward teaching mathematics for understanding. When teachers use a reform curriculum, with its potential to promote student understanding, initially they are often unaware of the need to reconsider their current assessment practices in light of the rich evidence generated through complex, real-world mathematics problems. However, as portrayed in Chapters 2, 3, and 4, and particularly in Chapters 11 and 12 by teachers Ann Frederickson and Teresa Her, considerable instructional conflict is generated when teachers use a limited range of assessment practices to assess more substantive learning goals. Getting teachers to shift their assessment practices toward assessing student understanding has the potential of invoking real instructional change, which is key to reaching the overall reform goals for school mathematics.

Although research supports the contention that formative assessment benefits student learning and can be used to facilitate learning with understanding, many mathematics teachers (as described in several chapters here) show limited understanding of the ways in which formative assessment can be incorporated into their classroom prac-

but in order to do this effectively, teachers require support in developing their ability to monitor student progress. In the studies reported in this volume, we found that teachers needed technical assistance with assessment design and that they sought tools and methods to further develop their capacity to assess student learning. The studies also showed that teachers could learn to use such practices in their classrooms, that they needed the support of appropriate professional development to do so, and that, as a result, their students' achievement improved (Fennema & Nelson, 1997; Webb et al., 2001).

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activities to further develop those conceptions. The mapping of instructional activities and assessment tasks onto a learning sequence for specific mathematical domains is based on the concept of *hypothetical assessment trajectories* (de Lange, 1999), which are loosely sequenced sets of performance benchmarks for student learning in a content domain. The notion of learning lines within content domains is used as an organisational framework for teachers to select, adapt, and design

assessments. There are practical issues teachers must consider, however:





## Outcomes

- Teacher dissatisfaction with current methods
  - Teacher classroom experimentation
  - Teacher use of other formative assessment methods
  - Teachers developing a sense of the pros and cons of using other methods in *their*
- Teacher categorization of tasks
  - Teachers designing Level 2 and Level 3 tasks
  - Teachers designing and using classroom instruments to assess a wider range of student thinking
  - Teacher development of nonconventional assessment instruments
  -
- Teachers learning to interpret student reasoning and use different student work as starting point for instruction (i.e., teaching for student understanding)
  - Increased use of student argumentation

**Initiate**

Professional development activities in this category are oriented

assessment practices. Teachers critique "expert" assessments, such as commonly used standardized tests and conventional classroom assessments. Teachers also engage in other assessment methods, as students, and respond to tasks that require Level 2 and Level 3 reasoning and

of shared knowledge is promoted through ongoing institutes, design and

a more comprehensive view use a wider range of assess administrators and teachers sional development program room assessment. Those inv as an opportunity to promo student understanding of m interrelated principles of ass work, and instructional deci

In the CATCH program grounded in the theory and ers developed a broader view for teaching for student unde tasks, instructional activities struction. Teacher inquiry o ploration of classroom as supported by ongoing collab ers the beginnings of a the assessment practices more teachers and administrators practical ways to monitor th lum standards and develop ing student performance on standardized tests. We note

ments they use, participate in the development of assessment materials, and reflect on and critique their own developing practices and those of their colleagues.

As Lorrie Shepard (2000) argued in her presidential address to the American Educational Research Association, "In order for assessment to play a more useful role in helping students learn, it should be moved into the middle of the teaching and learning process instead of being postponed as only the end-point of instruction" (p. 10). Assessment, particularly when situated as a necessary component of the teaching and learning process, *can* be used to bridge the often separate processes of educational practice, but it is unrealistic to expect teachers to become spontaneous assessment designers. Teachers need appropriate professional development support. A professional development pro-