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Considering the Role of Assessment:
A Precis of Shepard's "The Role of Assessment in a Learning Culture"
and Dann's "Assessment as learning"

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The importance of using assessment in combination with instruction cannot be stressed enough when considering its role within the classroom. Throughout the 20th century, assessments were frequently implemented in isolation, denoting the “end of the road.” However, researchers in support of social-cognitivism theories emphasize that when teachers and learners use assessments to inform both parties of the learner’s progress, there is opportunity for growth. Lorrie Shepard, a distinguished professor in research and evaluation methodology at the University of Colorado Boulder, and Dr. Ruth Dann, a Principal Lecturer at Manchester Metropolitan University, stress the use of assessment within an ongoing process of learning.

Shepard provides background information about how social efficiency influenced the creation of assessment in the 20th century, and both authors reference behaviorism as another influential factor. Shepard also introduces social-constructivist theories and explains their impact on current thoughts about instruction and assessment; she states that while instruction has been evolving and more receptive to social-constructivism, assessment remains stuck on the 20th century path guided by industrialism and urbanization. Shepard offers many suggestions for moving our educational system forward, including practical applications in the classroom, further focus on research, and encouraging our government policies to invest in the successful practices seen in other countries. Two of the classroom applications that Shepard emphasizes are instructional discussions and feedback.

Dann connects with these specific assessments and adds to Shepard's notes further specifications, concentrating on the significance of the learner in their own education.

Dann identifies "self-regulation, self-efficacy, and metacognition" as imperative steps in student learning and also explains that it is just as important for the teacher to understand how their learners will interpret the feedback they receive (Dann, 150).

While Shepard provides several potential ideas for teachers to introduce into their practice, such as incorporating assessment as a regular discussion among learners or moving assessment to the middle of an instructional theme, Dann adds emphasis to students understanding gaps in their own learning, assessment-related vocabulary, and a more in-depth focus on feedback. Shepard focuses on the changes the educator can make within their classroom assessments, and Dann adds to these changes the importance of the teacher understanding the student's role in their own learning. Dann states that the teacher must be aware of how the learner will receive and interpret feedback, must provide the learner with understanding of self-reflection used for growth.

(revised)

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When considering its role within the classroom, the importance of using assessment in combination with instruction cannot be stressed enough. Throughout the 20th century, assessments were frequently implemented in isolation, denoting the “end of the road.” However, researchers in support of social-cognitivism theories emphasize that when teachers and learners use assessments to inform both parties of the learner’s progress, there is more opportunity for intended instructional outcomes to be achieved. Lorrie Shepard, a professor in research and evaluation methodology at the University of Colorado Boulder, and Dr. Ruth Dann, a Principal Lecturer at Manchester Metropolitan University, both argue for the integration of more formative assessments in order to develop learning processes that are more adaptive than they are finite -- signaling the continuation of learning rather than the conclusion.

Firstly, Shepard provides the historical impact of social efficiency on assessment in the 20th century, and Shepard and Dann both reference behaviorism as another influential factor in “drill-based” summative assessments. Shepard introduces social-constructivist theories and explains their impact on current thoughts about instruction and assessment; while instruction has been evolving and more receptive to social-constructivism, assessment remains stuck on the 20th century path guided by industrialism and urbanization. Referencing past research, it is clear that leaning on traditional summative assessments can unintentionally stunt students’ development by signaling finality within the learning process.

To answer this educational concern, Shepard offers many suggestions for moving our educational system forward, including practical applications in the classroom, further focus on

research, and encouraging our government policies to invest in the successful practices seen in other countries. Shepard introduces two specific instructional practices: instructional discussions and feedback; both support student awareness of the intended purpose each formative assessment plays within their own learning process.

Dann not only agrees with instructional discussions but continues with further specifications. Dann highlights that learners must be active participants in their own learning opportunities, identifying “self-regulation, self-efficacy, and metacognition” as imperative steps in student learning (Dann, 150). Assessment as learning allows students to play a more integral role in their learning because “this type of interactive assessment, which allows teachers to provide assistance as part of assessment...help(s) teachers gain valuable insights about how understanding might be extended...creates perfectly targeted occasions to teach and provides the means to scaffold next steps” (Shepard, 10). Additionally, by moving assessment to the middle of an instructional theme, or incorporating assessment as a regular topic of discussion among learners, lessens the stigma surrounding summative assessment, and as a result, students reach more objectives. The interaction between teacher and student within the assessment process cannot be overlooked, “the interrelation between teaching and learning...is perhaps more blurred than much of the literature may hitherto present” (Dann, 154). Students should not be taking an assessment without purposeful discussion about how understanding has developed and how learning opportunities shall proceed in order to bridge gaps.

Student discussion about formative assessment is influential to learning, and the authors also discuss the importance of teacher feedback. Again, Dann dives deeper into the suggestions that Shepard has provided; Dann believes that a more in-depth focus on feedback is needed to truly make gains in the communication between teacher and student. The students play an integral role in their own learning, and in order to support them in this process, Dann states that the teacher must be aware of how the learner will receive and interpret feedback, must provide the learner with understanding of self-reflection used for growth. Dann references “a growth mindset” where students welcome feedback as an opportunity to motivate and guide their learning (Dann, 154). Feedback should be specifically related to the presented learning objective rather than given in relation to other learners, and in doing so, students will be more attuned with their personal understanding and learning process. Feedback is yet another practice that allows for assessment as learning -- assessment that marks an ongoing process.

When the classroom culture identifies formative assessment as a natural and consistent part of the learning process, students are better suited to participate in their learning. By adjusting the frequency of assessments, by including students within the conversation, and by providing purposeful and direct feedback, assessment as learning becomes an instructional practice that promotes achievement and continued learning.

References:

Ruth Dann (2014) Assessment as learning: blurring the boundaries of assessment and learning for theory, policy and practice, *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice*, 21:2, 149-166, DOI: [10.1080/0969594X.2014.898128](https://doi.org/10.1080/0969594X.2014.898128)

Lorrie A. Shepard (2000) The Role of Assessment in a Learning Culture, *Educational Researcher*, Vol. 29, No. 7, 4-14

List of Revisions

- re-considering my thesis to be more intentional and direct in order to help focus my entire precis
- many rewritten sentences, either switched around the dependent and independent clause or eliminated some “extra” wordiness
- added further support from authors
- provided a more obvious conclusion
- was more aware of transitions between thoughts, tried to make more definitive transitions