

The role of elicitation in formative assessment

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Introduction and aim

Research has shown that formative assessment has a large potential for accomplishing positive effects on student learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Hattie, 2009; Andersson & Palm, 2017). One main function of formative assessment is to adapt teaching strategies to students' learning needs (SLN). Adaption of teaching to SLN requires that information about these needs be elicited and understood. However, studies examining feedback effectiveness most often do not focus on how the quality of the acquired information influences the impact of feedback on student achievement.

My poster will describe a study that is part of a larger project that seeks to contribute to the development of a theory of action for formative assessment. This includes identifying mechanisms by which formative assessment affects student learning. The study presented in this poster contributes to the project by identifying how a mathematics teacher elicits information about SLN when they seek help during task solving. The study aims to describe different ways of eliciting relevant information, how these ways influence the quality of information acquired and how these affect possibilities to adapt the feedback to meet the SLN.

This poster will describe the study and emphasise the importance of elicitation in the formative assessment practice. In doing so, describe the different ways of elicitation the teacher uses and how they may relate to the adjustment of feedback the teacher makes.

Method

This qualitative case study focuses on in-depth insights into the practice of one experienced middle school teacher. The data consists of 15 audio recordings of the teacher's mathematics lessons in a year 6 class over the span of one year. During this time the teacher was a part of a professional developmental program which focused on improving formative assessment practises in the classroom. During the recorded lessons, the teacher helped students individually when they sought help during task-solving. The data will be analysed in a thematic approach by identifying ways of elicitation, types of feedback and the relations between them.

Tentative findings

Preliminary findings suggest that the teacher's way of eliciting may influence the type and relevance of information gathered about SLN. The teacher's feedback seems to align more closely with SLN when the elicitation process yields sufficient information, i.e. to enable the adjustment of feedback specifically to those needs. In cases where elicitation does not provide sufficient information, but the teacher proceeds to give feedback, this feedback often misses addressing the actual learning need.

Instead, it may focus on task completion, which could be a separate issue from the learning need. Thus, it is important to explore how various elicitation ways might affect the outcome of elicitation and subsequently, how this outcome might shape the adaptation of feedback to students' learning needs.

Following are transcripts of two teacher-student interactions that depict two different ways of dealing with elicitation. The first transcript shows how the teacher elicits information about the learning need, continues to elicit information when she doesn't receive sufficient information and by the end of the conversation, the student's learning needs are resolved. The second transcript shows how the teacher elicits information but proceeds to give feedback before having received sufficient information about the learning needs. In the end, the learning needs of the student are not resolved, prompting the conversation to loop back, with the teacher needing to start again with the elicitation process.

Transcript 1

Student: I don't get it...
Teacher: What are you supposed to find out? What is the assignment? Can you tell me?
Student: I must figure out the circumference and area of this thing...
Teacher: OK, what help have you received [from the textbook] to be able to solve it?
Student: Ehh... all sides are 1 cm.
Teacher: Yes, OK, what about it do you find difficult?
Student: I don't know... I don't understand. Should I count all of them, like that?
Teacher: Yes?... What do you think... How do you calculate the circumference?
Student: But I'm going to... You add everything together.
Teacher: Yes, you already knew that! Great!

Transcript 2

Teacher: OK, what assignment are you working with?
Student: 128. I have done like this [shows previous work] and the thing I don't get is...
Teacher: [Interrupts] Wait, where are you? Explain the assignment.
Student: [Explains the assignment]
Teacher: What formula have you used?
Student: I don't know... or what do you mean?
Teacher: [Explains the formula for calculating area]
Student: I have used that formula already.
Teacher: Oh? I see, right... Then what was your problem?
[Conversation continues...]

A key distinction between these two ways of eliciting is the persistence in continuing until sufficient information is acquired. The poster session will offer a chance to explore additional examples.

References

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