



Summary of the Podcast, *School's In, Beyond tests and quizzes: Getting creative with assessment during COVID-19*. Hosted by Dan Schwartz and Denise Pope with Maria Araceli Ruiz-Primo.

Podcast Summary: June 2020

This brief summarizes the Stanford University podcast, *School's In, Beyond tests and quizzes: Getting creative with assessment during COVID-19*¹. The podcast is hosted by Dan Schwartz, Dean of Stanford University Graduate School of Education (GSE) and Denise Pope, Senior Lecturer. Their guest, Maria Araceli Ruiz-Primo, is GSE Associate Professor and Director of Stanford's Laboratory of Educational Assessment, Research and Innovation (LEARN). The podcast focuses on teachers' ability to assess students' learning at a time when school closures have affected the administration of certain types of assessments.

Ruiz-Primo promotes the value of formative assessment which gathers information to help students move forward in learning. Feedback is the most important mechanism of formative assessment. During a two-way process, teachers learn about how they are doing based on what students are learning (e.g., their responses, their questions), just as students get feedback from teachers. Feedback is more than providing students with individual written or verbal feedback. It involves *instructional moves* that teachers implement based on what they learned from students' responses and questions. The quality of the tasks used to gather information about students' learning is also important. Bad tasks will lead to bad information and then feedback is less helpful. In addition, feedback can also come from other students.

Formative assessment is distinguished from other types of assessment, including: *high-stakes assessments*, such as SAT exams which determine admission to college; *large-scale assessments*, which provide aggregate data on student progress; and *summative assessments*, such as year-end grades.

Ruiz-Primo asserts that the break from in-classroom teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic allows teachers to focus on what really matters, specifically identifying the fundamental blocks of knowledge that students need to move their learning forward. Teachers should think about, and then focus on, what students need to know for the next academic year/school grade. She contends that *the limitations they (teachers) are facing now could open the door to more meaningful ways of assessing students' progress even when in-person classes resume*. Beyond formal assessment, informal information sources, such as students' questions and students' interactions, are valuable to understand what happens every day. Teachers should use these sources to have a better picture of the students' learning on an everyday basis

Ruiz-Primo suggests that online instruction allows teachers to gather feedback from the students in many ways:

- Teachers can put students in the role of asking questions, instead of the other way around. *The students' questions can be a source of information on whether they're learning or not.*

¹ Schwartz, D. & Pope D. (Hosts) & Ruiz-Primo, M. (Guest). (2020, May 4). *School's In, Beyond tests and quizzes: Getting creative with assessment during COVID-19* [Audio podcast]. Retrieved from <https://ed.stanford.edu/news/beyond-tests-and-quizzes-getting-creative-assessment>



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- When engaged in a zoom-type meeting with a small group of students, teachers can monitor how students are interacting – who is engaged, who is raising their hand, and who needs to be brought into the interaction.
- Teachers can present students with tasks to complete and anticipate what they will do right and wrong to then provide effective and rapid feedback.
- Moving away from grades to pass/fail during this time, allows teachers and students to focus on learning and not on grades. It is an opportunity to let students be more autonomous and express what they are thinking and how they are learning.

More generally, on-line and in the classroom, teachers should use a variety of sources to gather the information needed to assess students' learning and then adapt instruction. These include gathering information on what the students know by observing social interactions, extended discourse with students, student journals, exit tickets and observing activities in the classroom.

During this time of on-line learning, when teachers are less consumed with day-to-day tasks, specific curriculum and grades, Ruiz-Primo believes that teachers can conduct natural experiments to test their understanding of formative assessment and how they can help both the students' learning and the teachers' understanding of what they are teaching.