Creating a Proficiency Based System of Instruction and Assessment

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Proficiency based learning refers to systems of instruction, assessment, grading, and academic reporting that are based on students demonstrating that they have learned the knowledge and skills they are expected to learn as they progress through their education.

Source: The Glossary of Education Reform
What is the GOAL in implementing a proficiency based system?
A proficiency based system supports the following ideas:

- Grades should accurately reflect a student’s level of proficiency and/or mastery of specific skills, standards, and achievement.

- Students must be provided with clearly articulated and measurable learning goals.

- Since students vary in their rate of acquisition of new knowledge as well as their background knowledge, a proficiency based system requires teachers to differentiate instruction while emphasizing the end goal of learning new skills or information.

- Providing a culture of learning empowers students and creates a positive learning experience.

- The learning outcome should not just require rote memorization of facts, but emphasize the application of learned knowledge and skills.
Case Study

Rachel does her math homework every night but frequently needs the assistance of her older sister. She doesn’t always understand the problems but still receives full credit on her homework because all of her answers are correct. She participates in class and always puts forth her best effort. For the first interim report, her scores were as follows:

- Homework – 100/100 points
- Quizzes – 150/200
- Chapter Test – 69/100 + 5 extra credit points for writing her name neatly
- Classroom participation – 100/100

Total grade – 424/500 = 85%

Brandon does his math homework with little assistance. Sometimes he struggles with a newly learned skill and is not able to get the correct answer. He knows that when his teacher sees this, he will still get credit for completing the homework but she will then reteach the concept or skill. He can also replay recorded lessons, review his notes, or see his teacher for extra help. When Brandon doesn’t do well on a formative assessment, he completes additional work provided by his teacher until he is ready to take the assessment again. For the first interim report, his scores were as follows:

- Homework – 10/10
- Formative assessments including retakes – 33/40
- Summative assessment – 42/50
- Classroom participation – Great job!

Total grade – 85/100 = 85%
Case Study

Rachel’s Scores

- Homework – 100/100 points
- Quizzes – 150/200
- Chapter Test – 69/100 + 5 extra credit points for writing her name neatly
- Classroom participation – 100/100
- Total grade – 424/500 = 85%

Brandon’s Scores

- Homework – 10/10
- Formative assessments including retakes – 33/40
- Summative assessment – 42/50
- Classroom participation – Great job!!
- Total grade – 85/100 = 85%

Are Rachel and Brandon demonstrating the same level of proficiency?
Proficiency Based Assessment Structure

**Formative Assessments** – Assessments used as part of the instruction. These are considered to be assessments **FOR** learning.

**Summative Assessments** – Assessments used at the end of the unit, chapter, etc. These are considered to be assessments **OF** learning.
Proficiency Based Assessment Structure

The formative assessment provides feedback to teachers on their students’ progress towards proficiency.

Teachers then can provide explicit feedback to students on their individual progress.
I'm gonna need more specific feedback on my formative assessments.
Proficiency Based Assessment Structure

The goal of the summative assessment is to determine that students have reached, at a minimum, a level of proficiency on a specific skill or benchmark.
FORMATIVE MYTHS

Can students really take the formative over and over again?

It’s not fair to let some students keep the highest grade!

No one will study if they know they can just retake the formative!!

Isn’t everyone just going to get an A?
Can students really take the formative over and over again?

NO! Students should be required to do additional work, turn in missing homework, review the recorded lesson, etc. before scheduling a retake. Schools may decide specific criteria for allowing retakes and communicate this through their syllabi and student handbook.
FORMATIVE MYTHS

No one will study if they know they can just retake the formative!!

NOT TRUE!! Retakes require additional work on the part of the student and may not occur after the summative has been given.
FORMATIVE MYTHS

It’s not fair to let some students keep the highest grade!

Let’s look at a specific example to see if this is true…. 
“It’s not fair to let some students keep the highest grade!”

Case Study:

Jonathan gets a 95% on a formative. He has mastered the skill and is ready to move forward. Nice job, Jonathan!

Alexis gets a 65% on the same formative. She goes to the teacher’s office hours for extra help and then reviews the recorded lesson posted on the student portal or other resources as directed by her teacher. She then emails the teacher with specific questions she has about the lesson. After researching and discussing the answers, she is ready to take the formative again and scores a 95%. Nice job, Alexis! She has demonstrated mastery in this skill!

If we averaged Alexis’ two formative scores, she will receive an 80%. Does this accurately reflect her level of proficiency? Hasn’t she demonstrated the same mastery of the skill as Jonathan?
FORMATIVE MYTHS

“Isn’t everyone just going to get an A?”

MAYBE…. Remember, the GOAL is for students to demonstrate at a minimum a level of proficiency.

A proficiency grading system does not curve scores or give extra credit. Students receive the grade they earn.
Please remember to complete the session feedback found on the conference app!!

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or comments about today’s presentation.

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