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Original Citation

Eastburn, Sara (2009) "To learn or not to learn" from formative assessment and formative feedback? What the literature says. In: School of Education and Professional Development Postgraduate Research Conference, 24th March 2009, University of Huddersfield, UK. (Unpublished)

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“To learn or not to learn” from formative assessment and formative feedback? What the literature says.

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Research Festival – March 2009

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Aims

- To disseminate learning and findings from the early stages of my EdD research project such that:
  - Learning in respect of the process and findings is shared
  - Awareness is raised in relation to the subject matter
  - Discussion is generated and questions are raised to help me develop the research project
Outline

- Background and rationale
- Literature search
- Literature review
- Ethical approval
- Key issues
- Next steps
Ability to make **decisions**, **problem-solve** and [clinically] **reason** is paramount to graduate practice and professional integrity.

**How are these skills learned?**

**What specific learning opportunities have influenced this learning?**

Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (2006: 20) “...appropriate and timely feedback to students on assessed work in a way that promotes learning and facilitates improvement…”
Best Learning Strategies?

- “Trial and error” learning is essential to the learning process
  
  Race (1994)

- “Trial and error” learning is ineffective, unnecessary and unhelpful
  
  Sadler (1989)

- Formative assessment and formative feedback have the ability to encourage an individual to change and modify their activities to promote ongoing learning
  
  Black and Williams (1998)

- Formative assessment and formative feedback directly influence learner motivation
  
  Brown (1999); MacMillan and McLean (2005); Race (2005); Irons (2008)

- Learners do not always use feedback
  
  Irons (2008)

- Formative assessment and formative feedback is reliant upon, in part, the learner’s motivation to reduce this mismatch between actual and expected performance
  
  Biggs (1998)

- Assessment strategies can precipitate a strategic and tactical learning approach such that learners aim to understand the “rules of the game”
  
  Norton (2007)

- Formative assessment and formative feedback nurture the summative assessment process, especially when the theory/skill being learned is new
  
  McAlpine (2004)

- Feedback can have the most powerful single effect on achievement
  
  Rushton (2005)
Aim of the Study

- To investigate the worth attributed to formative assessment and formative feedback by learners
  - Discover the impact of formative assessment and formative feedback on the trajectory of learning
  - Correlation between the learner and educator’s view of its role?
What do I hope to achieve?

- Uncover the extent to which learners and educators **truly** understand their responsibilities, and those of other stakeholders, with respect to formative assessment and formative feedback within higher education
  - Students are supported along their individual learning continuum
  - Staff are educated, supported and guided
Definitions

Formative assessment is “any task or activity which creates feedback (or feedforward) for students about their learning”

Formative feedback is “… any information, process or activity which affords or accelerates student learning based on comments …”

Irons (2008: 7)
Theoretical Position and Research Paradigm

- Inductive position
- Interpretive paradigm
- Flexible

“...capture, interpret and explain how a group [of students] ... experience and make sense [of formative assessment and formative feedback] ...” (Robson, 2002: 89)
Central Research Question

What is the value and impact of formative assessment and formative feedback to the learning experience of students?

- What worth do learners and educators place on formative assessment and formative feedback within and across the learning spectrum?
- What role does formative assessment and formative feedback play in the “teaching” experience of the educator?
- Is there difference or similarity between the worth placed on formative assessment and formative feedback by learners and educators?
- Is there difference or similarity between practice-based educators and university-based educators as to the role and merit of formative assessment and formative feedback?
- How is formative assessment and formative feedback used to support the summative assessment process across the spectrum of education?
- What are the key features of formative assessment and formative feedback across education and how can these be implemented more widely?
Literature Search Strategy

- Search Terms:
  - Formative assessment (FA)
  - Formative feedback (FFB)
  - Learning (L)
  - Formative evaluation (FE)

- Search Dates:
  - January 1998 – March 2009

Koh (2008)

Black and Wiliam (1998)
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The Literature: the favourable

- Reactivate/consolidate prerequisite skills/knowledge
- Focus attention on important aspects
- Encourage active learning strategies
- Give opportunity to practice skills and consolidate learning
- Provide knowledge of outcomes
- Provide corrective feedback
- Help students monitor their own progress
- Develop self-evaluation skills
- Encourage self-regulated learning
- Guide the choice of ongoing learning activities
- Help students feel a sense of accomplishment
- Develop deep thinking and deep learning
- Maintain motivation and self-esteem
- Encourage employability skills
The Literature: the less favourable

- Encourage a surface learning approach
  - Gijsbels and Dochy (2006)
- Promote “assessment careers”
- Encourage rote learning
  - Irons (2008)
- Promote overconfidence
- Be unnecessary once the summative marks are known
  - Sinclair and Cleland (2007)
- Poor achievers are less likely to seek formative feedback
  - Smith and Gorard (2005)
- Be inhibitory to student progress
- Be underutilised by the learner
  - Covic and Jones (2008)
- Be useless without summative assessment
  - Taras (2009)
- Conflict with learning cultures
  - Davies and Ecclestone (2008)
- Under-resourced area of higher education
Ethical Approval

- National Research Ethics Service (NRES)
- Lengthy
- +/- local R&D Departments
Key Issues

- Need to look across the spectrum of education
- Considering the same
- Keep to task
Next Steps

- British Education Index search to complete first literature search
- Ongoing - read and review the literature
- Complete NRES application and submit for approval
- Schedule of work and timeframes
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