

# Take Account of Students' Prior Knowledge and Experience

Transcript for the online video from CSAI – Section 4

Welcome back to this module on Analyzing and Interpreting Evidence of Student Learning.

Recall that this module delves into four main ideas of Analyzing Evidence. They are:

- Analyze Relative to Your Learning Goals and Success Criteria
- Compare Evidence to Likely Range of Student Responses
- Use Multiple Sources and In-the-Moment Evidence
- Take Account of Students' Prior Knowledge and Experience

This video will focus on the fourth idea: Taking Account of Students' Prior Knowledge and Experience when interpreting evidence.

In formative assessment, teachers benefit from knowing what resources students bring to the classroom. These resources are also referred to as students' cultural funds of knowledge.

This knowledge is especially important when analyzing evidence, because *how* students are accustomed to sharing what they know makes a difference in the type and quantity of evidence they make available.

Youth have particular practices, ways of using language, and other learning resources that they use in their everyday lives that influence how they demonstrate their understandings and skills.

Students' communication and participant styles are also often based on the norms and values of their communities and families.

Within cultural groups, individual students also embody the full spectrum of variability in terms of personality, ways of speaking, and socio-linguistic levels.

In further considering cultural norms, if a community value is that it is appropriate to wait until mastering a skill before publicly performing, then students may feel they should wait to demonstrate a skill in front of the whole class until they are very good at it.

Taking this knowledge into account, a teacher can understand that a student's reluctance to respond may not indicate a lack of understanding or skill.

To gain accurate evidence, the teacher may choose to ask some students to share in small groups or one-on-one during the practice stage of learning.

In addition, the teacher can work on reframing for the students what whole group sharing means in their classroom, e.g., thinking of it as more of a workspace with co-participants rather than as a public space.

With any scenario, it is critical that teachers establish relationships early with students in order to ensure they are able to participate in learning experiences in line with their learning needs.

In short, in formative assessment teachers do not interpret evidence in a vacuum. They know their students and can leverage this knowledge when interpreting what the evidence means and then deciding what to do next. Knowing about students' prior knowledge, experience, and culture helps teachers to develop a contextual understanding of their students' learning.

This does not mean that teachers have a fixed view of their students' abilities, or have low expectations for some students. Rather it means that teachers are sensitive analysts who take into account their knowledge of students in understanding what student responses mean and to make well informed decision for advancing learning.

Good teachers understand their students' cultures and backgrounds and also have rich knowledge of their prior learning.

If teachers think that their analysis of evidence might be flawed because of what they already know about the student, then they will need to either corroborate or disconfirm their analysis by collecting and analyzing additional evidence before making decisions about next steps.

For example, in a lesson on family relations, a teacher sets a Learning Goal for her students to understand how to introduce themselves appropriately to different tribal members using clan names in the target language. This Learning Goal was set based on the teachers' assumption of her students' background knowledge. She thought that *all* of her students had a firm understanding of their clan structure.

In this lesson, students role play with one another, providing introductions of themselves to their partner. The partner plays the roles of different community members who need different information in their introductions based on their clan affiliations.

The teacher listens in on the student talk. At first she thinks that some students are having trouble remembering the clan names in the target language, but after listening further, she realizes that many students don't have a full understanding of the clan structure in their tribe. Based on this newly collected evidence, and an updated interpretation of her students' understanding of their clan system, the teacher decided to provide a mini lesson to the group of students who are missing this important building block.

At the conclusion of the mini lesson, the teacher has gained confidence that these students now have the background information they need. She has them continue role playing. Now she can accurately determine whether students understand how to introduce themselves in the target language to various individuals in their tribe based on clan affiliation.

Students may have only emerging capabilities in certain aspects of the target language while being competent in others, for example knowing everyday social language, but not formal language. Or having a good understanding of topic vocabulary but not of action verbs. Having a sense of these capacities for each student ahead of time can help the teacher better identify growth in student learning and track progress during the course of instruction.

Next, we'll pause and reflect.

What cultural experiences and knowledge inform your students' current learning?

Make a list of factors that you keep in mind when analyzing evidence of student learning.

Pause the video a moment for reflection.

#### Suggestion Note

While teachers will most often analyze evidence on their own, there are significant benefits to involving colleagues. Other teachers can greatly support the analytic process, providing insights that a single teacher may not be able to infer independently. This collaborative process goes a long way towards gaining deeper insights into student learning. A peer may have different cultural or content knowledge that can inform the analysis. Additionally, the act of discussion itself often helps develop a teacher's thinking about the meaning of evidence.

This module introduced one part of the formative assessment process, "Analyzing and Interpreting Evidence of Student Learning."

List two ideas that you think will help you be more effective in analyzing evidence.

Learning Goals, Success Criteria, Gathering Evidence, and Analyzing Evidence are all connected in the formative assessment process. In your own words:

How do these elements of the Formative Assessment process work together?

Pause the video a moment to reflect on this question.

Thank you! You have completed the module on Analyzing and Interpreting Evidence of Student Learning.

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