

Mary Miele: Welcome to Be Evolved, a podcast for parents and educators who prioritize developing possibility and expansion within the total educational process for themselves and their children or students. We invite you to listen to the podcast with your child or student in mind and with yourself at the center of the learning experience. Ultimately, our goal is to bridge the gap between educational expertise and research, translating it into practical action. Gaining knowledge plus taking action is what it means to be evolved. Hello, everyone. Welcome to January's edition of the Be Evolved Podcast.

Today we are talking with Becky Reback, who many of you who have been longtime listeners know well. Becky is an expert in educational assessments and works with the Evolved Education Company as Head of Assessment Services. We're going to discuss today the advantages of combining Formative and Summative Assessments for students of all ages. Welcome, Becky. So I want to just start by saying, I want to get right into it because many of our listeners are parents. I know they may know the word assessment, which is really a test, but can you explain a little bit more about the difference between a Formative Assessment and a Summative Assessment and how do they differ from each other?

Becky Reback: Sure. So a Formative Assessment, they are going to be ongoing evaluations, and we use them to monitor student's progress, provide them feedback during the learning process and make sure that they are reaching goals and milestones that we want them to be reaching. Summative Assessments, on the other hand, are typically going to be used to evaluate a student's overall understanding and knowledge at the end of a specific period of time. So at school, they would use a midterm or a final at the end of a course or at the end of a semester to evaluate what the student took from the course as a whole.

Mary Miele: Exactly. When we work with students at Evolved, something that I know you do is that you blend the Formative and these Summative Assessments in the educational assessments that we do here. Can you talk a little bit about the benefits of blending Formative and Summative Assessments in these assessments?

Becky Reback: Sure. Well, I think first of all, having a mix of information is always important. Having an understanding of what they know at the end versus what they know throughout the process is, of course, giving you an inside look into how that student is learning. Additionally, blending assessments can enhance the learning experience. Since Formative Assessments offer continuous feedback, they really help students identify areas of improvement. So we know how to target specific skills along the way. While on the flip side, Summative Assessments provide more of a comprehensive evaluation of their overall knowledge. So when we use them together, we're really creating a very holistic view of a student's progress, and we can make little adjustments along the way to make sure that their Summative Assessments are really showing skill acquisition and knowledge understanding.

Mary Miele: Yes, and I was just sitting in on one of these assessments, and I really was really understanding this in action, meaning we had a student who was working on telling us what letters and sounds he knew. Then the teacher taught him a letter and a sound and then later in the lesson went back to it and asked to have the student repeat what had just been taught. So in that way, for example, the student was learning something new and the teacher was actually figuring out how well the student would learn given that type of instruction. It's a short-term memory also piece there. So there was a lot that we can really grab when a student is in an assessment situation. So just to give an example of something that I saw, can you give us maybe another example of what we might see in an assessment that would be that blend of Formative and Summative?

Becky Reback: Sure. Absolutely. So you are talking about a younger student, but if I'm looking at older students and we are doing a reading assessment and we're looking at inferencing as a skill, so understanding implied information versus explicit information, which is listed directly in the text, so if I'm working through a story and I'm asking a why or a how question, those are typically your inferencing type questions and I notice that the student is really having a hard time picking out the information from the text and making an inference based on that, I might teach them what I like to call as my inferencing formula, which is what I read, plus what I know equals an inference, and I'm teaching them that formula. So we're using the text, and we're also using their background knowledge to make an inference. Then so I'm going to do it together with them.

I'm going to model it for them, we're going to do it together, and then I'm going to have them do it on their own. Then I'm going to read another story, and we're going to ask them to implement the same information that they just learned to see how they learn that information, and if they can use that and apply it and generalize that skill to another situation or another area that they're working in. You could also think about that as a hypothesis in science. So it all ties in together where you are teaching them a hypothesis, but then they have to apply that type of inferencing and guessing and predicting into their reading. So those are multiple ways to mix those two assessments together.

Mary Miele: Makes really good sense. Also, it helps the diagnostician, the educator to really understand what's working. So that's another part of what we want to pull out of these assessments. I don't know about you, but I've certainly seen many times over where a student is assessed and all that comes out of the assessment is what skills aren't learned, right?

Becky Reback: Yep.

Mary Miele: Like, "This is where the gaps are," and that's valuable information. That's what a Summative Assessment sometimes does. But a Formative Assessment can really tell us what strategies work to help the student to do what they're not doing. So therefore, we can go forward with that information in mind.

Becky Reback: Summative Assessment really allows us to teach metacognition to the students, and what is metacognition? That's a really big word. It's basically teaching

students to learn how they learn and to understand why they're doing certain tasks and what the ultimate goal is. So by using Formative Assessments, you can say, "Well, hold on, we're teaching you this inferencing strategy so that way you can apply it in this scenario, in this scenario, in this scenario." Then they're learning what works for them and what doesn't, so you actually in the moment during that Formative Assessment can tweak it to fit the brain of the student, which I think is pretty cool as well.

Mary Miele:

I think it's really cool, and I really think that this is where we can come in and help families and students to understand their learners and then empower the learners to go forward with using that understanding hopefully to help them. That's the ultimate goal of all of this, is to be able to do that. So you and I decided to do this podcast because we were looking at research, we were looking at current research, and there was an article that was published in actually a dental journal that talked a little bit about this exact concept of blending the Formative and the Summative.

I forwarded it on to you, and I remember just saying to you, "Oh, my gosh, look at this." These two researchers, Svensäter and Rolland, are really talking about what we are talking about, which is just that when you blend the Summative and the Formative Assessments in constructive ways, you can gain really important information that will set you off on a pathway of success within a particular student's educational process. So this is a research-backed idea, and I do want to just give you a moment to talk a little bit about your understanding of this blended approach in terms of the research and what it really does say about this process to parents and educators from an evidence-based approach.

Becky Reback:

Sure. There's lots of benefits here. I'll name a few. These studies are showing, and not only studies, but also we see this in our work day to day, which I think is obviously the study and the research is so important, and we back all of our work in that, but also it's great to see it happening in action as well, but they show that when you blend these two types of assessments, Formative and Summative Assessments together, the approach really improves that long-term retention of knowledge for our students. It also is boosting student engagement.

It's enhancing critical thinking skills, like I said. Because they are being a little bit more metacognitive throughout the process, they're engaged in their learning more. So they're thinking critically about how they learn to apply that, that strategy, that skill to whatever it is that they're learning. But also, of course, this is about students, but we also want to talk about teachers and educators as well. Blending your Formative and Summative Assessments really are allowing the educators to change or adapt their learning methods based on the real-time feedback of their students. They're making sure that they're planning and implementing their lessons as effectively as possible.

Mary Miele:

Sure, like just talked about. It doesn't just give you what the child knows versus didn't know. It gives you how they could know that which they don't know, and it gives you information about maybe why they didn't know what they didn't know or why they did know what they did know. There's more of that how and

why factor that comes in play, and it really does help everyone to be able to move forward. I imagine it also leaves the students feeling a lot more successful. I know when I was, of course, taking tests, and you've taken many too, when you get a score, let's say of AB 3%, you can't help maybe, but say, "Oh, darn, I really didn't know this much of the material." Your brain goes automatically to focus on that versus if you had that in addition to information about how you can learn that what you did not know, that would be really empowering for the student. I think that maybe is the punch of what we're really talking about here.

Becky Reback: Yeah, absolutely.

Mary Miele: Yeah. Yeah.

Becky Reback: I think so much of what we're learning these days in terms of research and understanding education and how kids learn best is flipping the script a little bit for the students and letting them feel empowered in their learning rather than feel badly about their learning.

Mary Miele: Exactly. Exactly. So let's just talk a little bit about some of the actions that you feel people could be taking right now because we want to leave with that. Let's talk about younger children, then we'll talk about older children. So let's say you have a younger child, meaning you have a 4-year-old going into kindergarten and you're really wanting to understand how much of what my child needs to know at this point is happening for my child. Also, that other piece of information, which is, how do they learn best? What can we do in an assessment to provide that information?

Becky Reback: Well, I think there's lots of ways to look at this. I think one really important way is to emphasize the importance of feedback and letting the child assess themselves a little bit, and how do you do that? I think especially for parents of young children, I have young children myself, and so I'm practicing this every single day is not jumping in immediately when they make a mistake or if they make a mistake. Let them muddle through it a little bit and see if there's an opportunity to teach rather than tell, so I think that's a really big key. You want to make sure that students are really taking ownership of their learning and use these Formative Assessments as tools for improvement. Every single day we are using Formative Assessments with our children, our students, because we're in real time changing what we're saying or reframing a question in order to help the student understand the material and move forward.

So it doesn't have to be always in this formal setting of an assessment, but parents are doing it too in their day to day, and I think that's something really important to remember. Of course, we want to make sure that we understand that learning is a journey and assessments give us a lot of information, but you also can take little tidbits of the day to understand exactly what your child is grasping and what they're not. So that includes following routines at home or getting dressed for school in the morning. What are their executive functions like? All of that are ways that you can assess how your child is moving through the day and likely how they're applying whatever that skill is to their learning.

Mary Miele: Sure, and just being, I think, curious is what I'm getting at from what you're saying. So just being really curious about how your child is understanding that which you are teaching them as a parent, how are you teaching them how to eat their breakfast and get out of the house in the morning and make sure they remember the items they need for various activities, these are the things that parents are in charge of, right? So-

Becky Reback: Right.

Mary Miele: ... just being curious and watching how your child acquires those skills and what the successes are and then teaching your child, "Hey, I notice when we use a picture to remind you that what you have to do in the morning that really works for you or your brain, let's keep doing that," or, "Hey, I notice when I give you two directions, you really do a great job with that. Let's just do that. Why not?" So just noticing what works and noticing the successes and then communicating that back to a teacher eventually once your child's in school to say, "Hey, I noticed that my child does really well when they have visuals or have two-step verbal commands," that sort of thing.

Then let's talk about an older child. So if you have an older child, maybe you have a middle school student, let's say, and they're going to be going through maybe a high school process. They're going to be looking around at high schools or they're just simply transitioning to high school. They're in seventh grade right now looking towards an eighth grade. What are some of the ways that we can help them with Summative and Formative Assessments to know about their learning styles and how they learn right now going into anything they need to?

Becky Reback: Sure. So I think one of the easiest ways to do this is simply just from sitting down with them and reviewing the feedback a teacher gives them, whether that's a report card, handwritten notes on a paper they turned in, test corrections. There's so many different ways that your middle schoolers can engage more with their learning, and it's really uncomfortable to review feedback on yourself, but it's so important, and that's what's going to help them become learners. So I think that that's really, really important. On our side, what we can do is when we do assessments with students, probably fifth grade, sixth grade and up, we're actually including them in the debriefs of the assessment. We're talking to them, not their parents, about what they did well and areas that they can grow.

I think that is huge because they actually have the opportunity to ask questions about their own learning and about their own performance on assessments. So, of course, we can work with them, but I also think it's teaching your child how to reach out to their teachers to review a test after they've gotten it back and they didn't do as well as they thought they did. Or even better, I would say reach out to their teachers and review a test they got a 99 on and talk about all the ways they studied that set them up for success on that test so they can really do that again the next time. So I think with the older ones, it's really about engaging them and understanding what worked and what needs to be worked on.

Mary Miele: Exactly. I'm really hearing what you're saying in terms of this word feedback. So those who are listening, I don't know if you heard that as amplified as I did, but certainly, teaching our kids to pay attention to feedback, teaching ourselves to provide feedback to our children is really part of that Formative Assessment process. So if you want an action to take today as you listen to this, that is one to take and carry forward. So today, as you're parenting your child, you can provide feedback that's constructive. So you could say, "Hey, I notice when you do this task, this is working really well," or you could ask it as a question, "I'm wondering how come that works really well for you? What is it about what you're doing that is working?" Or, "What is it about what you're doing isn't working? Let's go and find different ways to do this because it's important that you keep growing." That's the whole point of the work that we're doing in the learning process is not to throw our hands up and say, "Well, that was the grade, moving on."

So I don't know if you can relate to this, but I was just working with a kid in December who is a sophomore, and she would take her tests and just put them in the home file box. It's like, "Okay, that's done. Bye." So I think that's the miss that we're talking about, right? That's the Summative-only process. That's where we just literally take a test, get the end result and put it away. What we're just suggesting is that we flip the switch a little bit here and consider the Formative process of learning how did you get to that Summative result? What worked, what didn't work? How do you as a person and your brain right now learn best? That's what we want to consider in these blended assessments that we're providing you the opportunity to do as parents and educators. Also, here at Evolved, we have our assessment suite of services that can help in this exact regard to give you more information. So Becky, I do want to just give you a minute. Yeah, go ahead.

Becky Reback: Yeah. Sorry. I think it's important to note that you can do all of that with younger kids just at their level.

Mary Miele: Sure.

Becky Reback: I do it with my five-year-old all the time. She brings home her morning work or her book bags or any of that type of stuff, and we review it. We talk about what went well and what areas of challenge were and what she's still working on.

Mary Miele: Right.

Becky Reback: At her level, it's age appropriate, but it's setting her up for success when she does get to that older age to be able to handle and implement feedback. I also really like to talk about situational differences like, "What happened on this test? What did you do to study for this test that got you the 99 versus your last test that got you the 83? What do you think went differently? What did you do differently to study? Did you make an outline? Did you do flash cards? Did you do an online program?" Whatever it might be. So that's really that Formative piece, but also it's like a reflective Formative piece, and sometimes that's really important to inform what you should do the next time.

Mary Miele: I love that. That's really, really interesting. I also think it's something that parents can provide because we're on the outside looking in, so we're looking at our children move and work and all of this. It actually also brings me to another idea, which is just that as a parent, I need to work within this process too. I know we don't-

Becky Reback: Yeah. Oh, yeah.

Mary Miele: We don't always have this ability to have a Summative Assessment on our parenting, but I can definitely say that as I've been doing this work with Evolved, I've been more inclined to look at what's working well in my parenting versus what isn't, and also some of the goals I have, just making goals and saying, "I really want this to be something that my kids take away from my parenting, and so how do I act in a way that will align with that?" So even just recently with one of my kids, we had an issue where there was actions I wasn't super happy with in terms of how they were presenting themselves to their teachers. Knowing that it was important to me as a parent, summatively, it's important that my kids show up in their life with a certain level of respect and politeness in all of this, and when that doesn't happen, it's easy for me to execute certain boundaries and consequences and things, just knowing that that's the summation of where I'm going, right?

Becky Reback: Yeah. Yeah.

Mary Miele: So I think it can really help... this whole blended approach can be brought into a lot of this aspect, or many different aspects, let's just say, of parenting, educating, raising our kids, because we're all learning. We're all moving in this forward trajectory, right? Yeah, and this is how it's [inaudible 00:21:06]

Becky Reback: Life is a Formative Assessment.

Mary Miele: Yeah. That's right. Life is a Formative Assessment. It sure is. It sure is. Well, I just want to give you a minute to say more about how parents who are curious about learning more with you. How can we access your knowledge and expertise? What are some of the services you are offering? If parents are just not sure and they just want to have a call with you, how do they find you for that opportunity?

Becky Reback: Sure. The best place is on our website probably. You can book a call with me right then and there. I'm happy to even give you 15, 20 minutes just to talk through things, and if you feel like then there's more steps that need to be taken, we can do that. Of course, we have a whole host of assessments that I feel super passionate about, and I think they really work and do tell us about our students, which I think are amazing. But also, I do a lot of education advocacy and consulting. So sometimes there's ways that we can use those assessments to talk to the school, talk to the student and really blend those two Formative and Summative Assessments to make sure that our students are learning optimally.

So the possibilities are limitless, which I think is something that's amazing about Evolved, and I think we feel really passionately about this. We're willing to problem solve any problem that there is, but everything is rooted in the research and the data, so I think that that's really great. Parents tend to respond really well to that because there's facts in front of them, and we use actionable items to move forward. So definitely reach out if you have questions. I'm happy to chat at any point. I love talking about all of this.

Mary Miele: Yes, Becky and I both do. We're often chatting about it at all times.

Becky Reback: Even in our free time.

Mary Miele: Exactly. Exactly. Even in our free time, which is important. I think it's so fun. I want to thank you, Becky, so much for sharing your insights on the benefits of blending Formative and Summative Assessments and also bringing to light how Evolved Education Company can implement this approach for parents and educators. It's been a pleasure to have you. Thank you so much for bringing in this new year and this new podcast.

Becky Reback: Our podcast.

Mary Miele: Thank you so much. All right, thanks so much for everybody for listening. Have a wonderful rest of your month.

Becky Reback: Bye.

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