



# Module 2

## Learning Progressions

A Formative Assessment Program Created by  
The Assessment & Accountability Comprehensive Center  
and The North Central Comprehensive Center at McREL

### Facilitator's Guide



Assessment and Accountability  
Comprehensive Center

AACC • A WestEd and CRESST partnership



North Central  
Comprehensive Center  
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# Module 2

## Learning Progressions

### Overview of Module 2

This module is the second in a series of seven modules in the Formative Assessment Program. Participants will build on their understandings of the process of formative assessment and learn about Learning Progressions and how they relate to the process of formative assessment. Participants will have the opportunity to engage in processing activities to deepen their understandings, and apply new ideas and understandings about Learning Progressions and Formative Assessment to their own contexts.

### Module 2 Learning Goals

1. Understand how learning progressions support formative assessment.
2. Understand the relationship among standards, scope and sequence and learning progressions.
3. Understand how learning progressions can be developed.

### Module 2 Success Criteria

Participants can:

1. Explain how learning progressions support formative assessment
2. Explain the difference between standards, scope and sequence, and learning progressions
3. Describe how learning progressions can be developed
4. Develop a learning progression

### Main Message for Module 2

Module 2 is intended to provide participants with an introduction to Learning Progressions. Learning Progressions describe how learning progresses in a particular content area or domain. They are essential in helping teachers and students understand where the student is now, where s/he is going, and what is necessary to help the student progress on the learning trajectory/continuum. Teachers need information about the pathways along which students are expected to progress.

### At a Glance

#### Presenting the Workshop

Check When Complete	Lessons	Materials and Handouts
	Introduction to Module 2	PPT Introduction 2
	<b>Turn &amp; Talk:</b> What does the term “learning progression” mean to you?	PPT questions
	<b>Lesson 1</b> <b>Introduction to Learning Progressions</b> <b>60 – 75 minutes</b>	
	Lesson 2.1	PPT 2.1
	<b>Consolidate Your Learning:</b> Venn Diagram of Learning Progressions, Standards, Curriculum Scope and Sequence	Handout 2.1.1
	<b>Lesson 2</b> <b>Learning Progressions - Examples</b> <b>60 minutes</b>	
	Lesson 2.2	PPT 2.2
	<i>Scarcity Learning Progression</i> (Video) Learning Progression: Social Studies Learning Progression: English Language Arts Learning Progression: Mathematics <b>Your Turn:</b> Learning Progression Review	Video on PPT Handout 2.2.1 Handout 2.2.2 Handout 2.2.3 Handout 2.2.4
	<b>Lesson 3</b> <b>Creating a Learning Progression</b> <b>75 – 90 minutes</b>	
	Lesson 2.3	PPT 2.3
	<b>Your Turn:</b> Developing a Learning Progression: Key Considerations	Handout 2.3.1
	<b>Turn &amp; Talk:</b> Learning Progression Review	Handout 2.3.2
	<b>Try It Out:</b> Share Learning Progressions with Colleagues, Revise	Handout 2.3.2
	<b>Approximate Total Time: 3 hours, 30 minutes</b>	

### Background Information

In the U.S., the idea of learning progressions has recently received considerable attention (for example, Alonzo & Gearhart, 2006; Black, Wilson & Yao, 2011; Corcoran, Mosher, & Rogat, 2009; Heritage, 2008, 2009). Alonzo & Steedle (2008) note that “the ‘learning progression’ label has been applied to a variety of descriptions, which vary in terms of what is being portrayed—whether content, conceptions, or performances—and in their breadth and grain size” (p. 391). The range of descriptions of learning progressions includes the following:

- “Learning progressions are tied to big ideas, the central concepts and principles of a discipline. At the core of learning progressions is enactment or use of big ideas in practices, namely, the learning performances. Both the learning progressions and learning performances can then be used as guidelines for assessment development.” (Duschl, 2006, p. 116)
- “Learning progressions are based on research syntheses and conceptual analyses and describe successively more sophisticated ways of reasoning within a content domain that follow one another as students learn. They lay out in words and examples what it means to move toward more expert understanding.” (Smith, Wiser, Anderson, & Krajcik, 2006, p. 2)
- “A learning progression is a sequenced set of subskills and bodies of enabling knowledge that, it is believed, students must master en route to mastering a more remote curricular aim. In other words, it is composed of the step-by-step building blocks students are presumed to need in order to successfully attain a more distant, designated instructional outcome.” (Popham, 2008, p. 24)
- Learning progressions are successively more sophisticated ways of thinking about a topic that can be used as templates for the development of curricular and assessment products.” (Songer et al., 2009, pp. 2-3)
- Vertical maps that provide “a description of skills understanding and knowledge in the sequence in which they typically develop: a picture of what it means to ‘improve’ in an area of learning.” (Masters & Forster, 1996, p.1)
- Learning progressions are based on research about how students’ learning actually progresses—as opposed to selecting sequences of topics and learning experiences based only on logical analysis of current disciplinary knowledge and on personal experiences in teaching. These hypotheses are then tested empirically to ensure their construct validity (Does the hypothesized sequence describe a path most students actually experience given appropriate instruction?) and ultimately to assess their consequential validity (Does instruction based on the learning progression produce better results for most students?)” (Corcoran et al., 2009, p. 15)
- “Learning progressions are descriptions of the successively more sophisticated ways of thinking about a topic that can follow one another as children learn about and investigate a topic over a broad span of time (e.g., 6 to 8 years)” (NRC, 2007, p. 218).

Although there are variations in these definitions of progressions, taken as a whole, some dominant themes emerge:

1. Progressions lay out in successive, sequenced steps, increasingly more sophisticated understandings of core concepts and principles in a domain.
2. Progressions are based on research and conceptual analysis.
3. Progressions describe development over an extended period of time.

While the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) have attempted to provide clearer standards than many existing state standards, they still do not represent a fully formed pathway along which students are expected to progress. Importantly, they do not include the significant intermediate steps within and across grade levels leading to attainment of the standards. This is also the situation with regard to most state and district standards in all subjects.

Researchers have begun to develop methodologies for creating and empirically validating progressions (or trajectories, as they are referred to in math) as representations of how students develop increasing expertise in a domain (see, for example, Black, Wilson & Yao, 2011; Confrey & Maloney, 2010; Songer, Kelcey & Gotwals, 2009). Once fully realized, these progressions will provide educators with much clearer descriptions of learning than are presently available in the form of standards and scope and sequences and be a valuable resource for curriculum, instruction and formative assessment. However, the development of progressions is not solely the purview of researchers. Teacher can also create a progression of student learning to provide resources for instruction and formative assessment. An added pay-off is that teachers who are involved in developing progressions engage in a deep investigation of a domain and increase their knowledge about learning in their subject area. This can only be an advantage to their ability to promote learning in their classrooms (Heritage, 2011).

Progressions act as a blueprint for formative assessment because teachers can map ways of evidence gathering to the progression. For example, at a particular point in the lesson, teachers can ask questions that are designed to reveal student thinking relative to a specific learning goal in the progression. Because teachers have engaged in considering antecedent, proximate and successive learning related to the building blocks of the progression, their interpretation of evidence can be mapped back to the progression, providing an indication of where students are in their learning and where they need to move to next.

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### Essential Planning and Set Up

This section of the guide is provided to assist you in preparing to facilitate the learning sessions with your group. We know that the person selected to facilitate each team varies in background, skill and understand of formative assessment, and have designed the information with the following assumptions. We assume that the facilitator:

- Will clearly communicate the expectations to the participants
- Has content knowledge
- Understands adult learning practices
- Includes all participants in the lesson delivery and activities
- Will clearly communicate schedules, logistics, what to bring to meetings, time commitment, and all other necessary information to participants
- Will follow up with individuals to help each participant grow in knowledge and skill, and meet their personal growth goals

### Essential Planning

Before the meeting:

- Read the Module 2: Learning Progressions facilitator's guide in its entirety and become familiar with the content and activities.
- You will need to make a decision at the end of Lesson 2. Participants can either develop a learning progression or move on to Module 3 instead. To make this decision, you will want to consider the prior knowledge and understanding your teachers have about learning progressions. New learners may just want the overview information from Lessons 1 and 2, and can come back to Lesson 3 at the conclusion of the module series when they have a greater understanding about the process of formative assessment. Some teachers may want to give the development of learning progressions a try. You can discuss this choice with your teachers at the end of Lesson 2 to help them make the decision.
- Watch the Lesson 2 video (Jason Riley: *Scarcity Learning Progression*) to see how one teacher describes his experience with learning progressions.
- Review the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics, found at <http://www.corestandards.org>. A familiarity with the Common Core

State Standards (or the set of standards adopted by your state) is vital to facilitation of this module.

- Complete the background reading suggested in the prior section.
- Run through each lesson and activity yourself before presenting it to others. Make sure you are familiar with each of the handouts included in this module.
- Determine how you would like the group to use the online handouts and readings – digitally with laptops, with printed copies of the PowerPoint and handouts that you provide, or the expectation that participants print the PowerPoint and handouts themselves.
- Establish and communicate the meeting times and place with participants.
- Visit with each participant prior to the first meeting to find out where they are in their journey with formative assessment; the skills, knowledge and understanding they already bring to the content and to the group. It will also be helpful to know each participant's background in the use of the Common Core State Standards.

On the day of the meeting:

- Prepare the room. Ensure that the room is comfortable and that computer speakers and a working Internet connection are available to present the online module content.
- Provide refreshments or ask participants to bring their own drinks and/or snacks so they can concentrate, especially if the meetings are held after a school day.
- Keep to the time schedule.
- Be certain to include every participant in the group discussions.
- Establish ground rules or working norms for meetings and discuss them with participants.

Sample norms might include:

- Listen for understanding
- Engage in the work
- Allow all voices to be heard
- Focus on solutions
- Assume positive intent
- Challenge ideas, not people
- Respect perspectives of others

After the meeting:

- Follow up with each individual at least once between lessons to see how their Try It Out and TLC work is going. Offer individual tips, feedback, and assistance as needed by each person.
- Engage in some reflective dialogue exercises with participants to get their feedback for you as a facilitator. Ask them how you can continuously improve the workshop and your facilitation skills.
- Review the entire module at the end before moving to Module 3: Planning for Formative Assessment.

“Spectacular achievement is always preceded by unspectacular preparation.”

- Robert H. Schuller

- Quote found on <http://thinkexist.com/quotations/preparation/>

### *Advice for Facilitators*

- Be certain to send the agenda to all team members prior to the meeting date.
- Establish and review the learning team's ground rules, participant expectations for each session, and how to close each session.
- If participants are bringing laptops, be certain to have tables, chairs, and power strips to plug in cords.
- Establish partners for lesson pairing, sharing, and collaborating in discussions. These partners may remain the same or may switch as you complete each module.
- You may wish to have a notebook or printed copy of the English Language Arts and Mathematics Common Core State Standards, or other state/districts standards used. This will be a handy reference when talking about learning progressions within the Common Core.
- Use formative assessment strategies with your participants whenever appropriate.

### *Ten Formative Assessment Strategies to Try*

1. Clarify the learning goals and success criteria at the beginning of each collaborative learning team meeting. Post them on the wall. At the end of the meeting, go back to the success criteria and check off the learning goals and success criteria reached.
2. End lessons with a 5-minute “Turn to Your Neighbor” time to recap and discuss key points from the lesson.
3. Give everyone on the learning team an index card with a different question relating to the meeting's topic. Ask participants to respond to the question throughout the meeting and share out at the end.
4. Provide participants with statements to agree or disagree with prior to beginning the lesson or before moving on to a new lesson.
5. Let participants develop some activities and guiding questions to ask each other during and after the meetings related to the learning goals and success criteria identified for the module.
6. Use a feedback protocol such as “2 Stars and a Wish” that allows partners or teams to provide feedback to each other. Stars are strengths, and wishes are areas in which improvement is suggested. Ask participants to be specific about both the stars and wishes and connect them to the learning goals and success criteria for the lesson.
7. Ask participants to write “Minute Papers” to end a lesson. Minute Papers are generally written on half sheets of paper or index cards. Allow participants to write one or two important concepts from the day's lesson. The purpose is merely to provide a chance to self-reflect on one or more important understandings gained from a lesson or a module.
8. The following questions can be used to guide participants in a self-reflection:
  - o What do I currently know or think I know about this topic?
  - o Why is it important for me to know about this?
  - o What questions do I have about this topic?
  - o What do I expect to learn from studying this topic?

- o How can I find out more information on this topic?
  - o What do the experts say?
  - o Has this made a difference somewhere else?
9. Ask participants to write about their learning experience in a learning log or journal on a regular basis. Participants can indicate what they tried each day, what frustrations or barriers they are experiencing, what they plan to do next, and what questions they have about formative assessment. Have participants bring their logs to meetings and share their entries with the team or a partner.
10. Ask participants to engage in an observation and reflective dialogue with another team member. Ask them to invite another team member into their classroom for a peer observation of one learning goal from the module. Set up a time for the observer to provide descriptive feedback. Use the success criteria for the module to provide descriptive feedback to each other. If face-to face peer observations aren't possible, video a lesson where you are using formative assessment practices. Bring the video to a team meeting and ask for descriptive feedback on the practice.

### Implementation, Intersession and Feedback Advice

#### *Implementation Advice*

This section includes tips for you, the facilitator, on what to emphasize, ideas for grouping teams, opportunities to deepen participant understanding, and how to handle situations in which issues arise.

The advice below is based on work with diverse audiences including state departments of education, regional education associations, school and district leadership, and K-12 teachers. Plan each lesson with your particular set of participants in mind.

Groups will often self-sort and will want to stay together rather than interact more broadly. Decide when this is appropriate and discuss it with participants so that problems do not arise when you ask them to change their discussion groups. Use the TLC groups as one way to group your participants.

The questions you ask and the time you provide for reflection and discussion are all important components of effective implementation. Because Module 2 is the first chance for many participants to develop an understanding of learning progressions, the amount of information may seem overwhelming. This is central to the formative assessment process. As we progress from Module 1 to Module 2, we are still emphasizing how the bigger picture of learning is linked to the formative assessment instructional process.

Some of your participants will want to immediately discuss classroom practice related to formative assessment, but a broader understanding of how learning progressions link to curriculum, instruction and formative assessment processes will provide a necessary foundation for the modules to come. Before getting started on Module 2, link back to Module 1 and provide an opportunity for participants to talk about what they are thinking about, what questions they have and what

happened during their Try It Out experiences. You may want to save some questions for later, but record or post them so that they can be referred to when appropriate.

Most of your participants will not have previous experience with learning progressions, so you will want to assemble mixed groups of building administrators and those with classroom experience. In most of this module, providing non-classroom teachers with sample content materials, particularly from the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), will be useful. Ask all of your participants to gather and have available the local, state and national standards and curriculum documents that they use to guide the curriculum maps, scope and sequence, and classroom learning for students.

The lessons in Module 2 can be facilitated separately or taught sequentially during a one-day professional development experience. Because the materials are available online, the lessons themselves can be taught either face-to-face or using a phone conferencing system such as Polycom® or GoToMeeting®. You may need to provide a mixed model of face-to-face and video conferencing participants. If you plan to include all of the lessons in a one-day experience, think about how to incorporate the activities that will consolidate the participants' learning. The lessons are designed to include reflection and discussion activities. Plan the experiences with the learners in mind and in ways that support positive learning environments. Skipping some activities and requiring participants to do the same thing again and again will be less engaging. The sessions themselves should model the formative assessment process. Include a focus on feedback from you to the participants and the participants back to you as part of a continuous improvement process. Because this content requires think time and reflection from your participants, breaking up the lessons and including additional opportunities to clarify their understanding are recommended.

Clearly, preparing participants for identifying, creating and implementing learning progressions will take time. First, participants need to explore the research and implementation strategies and relate them to their own ideas. Then they need to prepare for change before engaging in initial implementation. Schools and districts that have successfully implemented formative assessment processes have developed their practices around common language, common expectations and common methods. This includes a clear differentiation between a district scope and sequence and broader learning progressions related to different content domains. The district implementation team is important for this step of the process and the development of learning progressions may need to continue with district support, beyond what is provided during this formative assessment professional development. Some districts may get so involved in clarifying the learning progressions that they never move forward with the rest of the formative assessment process. It is important to determine a strategic plan to continue this work while the rest of the professional development work is continuing.

Read the advice provided below as you plan for each lesson in Module 2. The text will emphasize some main ideas from the lesson; highlight places where participants may struggle and get confused, and provide suggestions or probing questions to help you model the formative assessment process and facilitate the learning experiences.

<b>Lesson 1</b>	<b>Introduction to Learning Progressions</b> <b>Main Messages:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Learning progressions provide a bigger picture of learning and can support the process of formative assessment.</i></li> <li>• <i>Learning progressions are different from standards or from a scope and sequence.</i></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Before sharing the summary research findings for learning progressions found in the overview of this guide and in the Lesson 1 slides, reveal participants' prior knowledge by having them complete a sentence strip for their group that describes learning progressions in their own words. They were introduced to this idea and the formative assessment terms in Module 1. Gather ideas from each group. Summarize the key features that each group considers to be essential components of a learning progression. Share the research slides and have participants add to the phrases and ideas already mentioned. Since the research includes the idea of learning trajectories, ask participants to explain their understanding of the relationship between learning trajectories and learning progressions.</li> <li>• The key idea for this lesson is to understand that             <p style="text-align: center;">Learning Progressions are descriptions of successively more sophisticated ways of thinking about an idea that follow one another as students learn: they lay out in words and examples what it means to move toward more expert understanding.</p> <p>Remind participants that our students begin at novice levels of understanding, and with carefully identified learning goals and learning experiences will develop more sophisticated ways of thinking about an idea. So to learn, students need ever more sophisticated ways of thinking about the learning progressions that organize learning in domains. Using a discussion protocol, have participants think about what it means for their students to be novice learners who are developing more expert understanding.</p> </li> <li>• Helping participants to understand the difference between standards, curriculum scope and sequence, and learning progressions is central to this lesson. Allow sufficient time for participants to process the information that helps distinguish these ideas. A Venn diagram will support the similarities and differences between them.</li> </ul>	
<b>Lesson 2</b>	<b>Learning Progressions—Examples</b> <b>Main Message:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Learning progressions identify the building blocks of learning of concepts/skills/practices over time.</i></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Even though we focus on a formative assessment process in this module, summative assessments can also provide information about where students are on a learning progression.</li> <li>• Discuss the following: “How do learning progressions help students to develop understanding of the big ideas in a subject?”</li> <li>• Developing learning progressions requires deep knowledge on the part of participants. Mixed subject-area grouping means that the feedback and discussions will likely not be as</li> </ul>	

useful. Building a library of examples for review and reflection will help. Remember that at this point in the module, participants can review a variety of examples specific to their content, but if participants are not ready to create their own, then this will be the end of Module 2.

- The English language arts and mathematics examples of learning progressions between standards are used with permission from the Center for Standards and Assessment Implementation (CSAI) resources. For more information on CSAI resource, please visit the website: <http://csai-online.org/curriculumandinstruction> .

### Lesson 3

#### Creating a Learning Progression

##### Main Message:

- Having well-crafted learning progressions is essential to effective implementation of the formative assessment process. This may include identifying existing learning progressions from the literature or working in grade-level teams to accomplish the sometimes messy work of creating them. Have each person record what they learned from the example processes and their personal take-away-message. Do a whip-around with the group to get each person to share their thinking.
- This work may be difficult for participants who have limited classroom experiences. As instructional leaders, they will want to build their understanding of the CCSS documents and other content standards. Let them self-select the content teams they want to work with.
- Discuss next steps with the participants. What do they need next to continue to develop both an understanding of the role of learning progressions and to develop learning progressions? Where will the learning progressions be stored so that teachers and administrators can use them?

### *Intersession Advice*

If you are teaching each lesson separately, you'll want to be sure that the activities you do in this module build from lesson to lesson and that participant understanding is developed and can be conceptually linked to the next module. Your participants may need specific tasks and multiple opportunities to engage meaningfully with the content. The "Consolidate Your Learning" or "Try it Out" activities at the end of each lesson are designed to continue the learning and reinforce the ideas by connecting them to participants' prior knowledge. These activities also help participants analyze or apply learning to classroom practice as they build a mental model of the formative assessment process.

In addition to the "Consolidate Your Learning" and "Try it Out" activities, we pose three options for intersession work before moving to the next module:

#### Option 1

Additional Input (individual or group) – Watch a YouTube video, read an article, etc. Return to Margaret Heritage's article on learning progressions from the recommended reading. Discuss her

article or check any of the references listed that would help deepen an understanding of the relationship between learning progressions and curriculum, instruction and formative assessment. This will reinforce the learning from Lessons 1-2. Ask participants to identify what is most confusing to them about the ideas presented and the barriers to implementation by classroom teachers. Have them work together and share their findings with their TLC groups or group participants that want to investigate the same references.

### Option 2

Collaboration with others – Within a PLC group meeting, face-to-face, or virtually on a wiki or other Web 2.0 platform, discuss questions generated by the group to extend their learning (or provide them with 3 questions based on lesson/module learning goals and success criteria). For Lesson 3, you can ask them to create another learning progression similar to the CCSSO examples, then share with others and discuss them as small groups.

### Option 3

Action Research – This occurs when you ask participants to try something and reflect on how it goes (self-reflection or peer feedback). This works particularly well after completing all three lessons. A teacher or group of teachers, working with their administrative team, can implement a piece of a learning progression as part of a sequence of learning. Make decisions about when to assess student progress. Gather data to determine how evidence of student learning can inform the next instructional steps. After gathering the data throughout the learning sequence, evaluate how the process worked and reflect on revisions to the process. Teachers won't know if this works until they try it. Working collaboratively with others from the participant groups will allow teachers to compare their student data and the instructional steps that they implemented. Refer back to the measurement example when developing the action research model.

After providing these options to your group, be certain to gather information regarding what options they select, what materials and other resources they use, and what impact these options have on their learning and implementation.

### *Feedback Tool*

As you progress through each module, we suggest that you keep track of how the learning is progressing using the following feedback template. Create your own template if you wish to gather information. This is important since the formative assessment process needs to be modeled by you as you work with others, and the feedback you gather will inform your role as a facilitator.

# Module 2

Learning Progressions

Feedback Template

## Facilitator's Guide

Lesson	What worked well?	What didn't work?	Checks of Learning	Next Steps
<b>Lesson 1: Introduction to Learning Progressions</b>				
<b>Lesson 2: Learning Progressions – Examples</b>				
<b>Lesson 3: Creating a Learning Progression</b>				