

KEEP THE BIG PICTURE IN FOCUS

In the CLI Model, curriculum is written as “high-achievement *unit* outcomes.” These units of instruction are created by pulling together related skills and concepts, and describing the results a learner can achieve by using the skills and concepts in *combination* rather than *isolation*. The final result that is described is the *outcome*, and the skills and concepts are *components* of that outcome. Another way to think about this is that the outcome is the “big picture” and the components are “small snapshots” taken along the way.

CLI recommends two types of assessment as part of the instructional process. At the conclusion of instruction for each component, a short, *formative* assessment is administered. When all components have been completed, then a *summative* assessment requires students to demonstrate that they can pull all the components together for the final result. The formative assessments are necessary because if students don’t understand one of the components, then obviously they will have much difficulty “pulling all the components together.” Additionally, the teacher needs to know when and where misunderstandings occur so the problem can be corrected immediately. Waiting until the conclusion of the unit to administer an assessment allows misunderstandings to be compounded and much time wasted by having to “go back to the beginning.”

Providing instruction and formative assessments for each component is good practice – but *only* if students know in advance what the “big picture” is, and how each component fits into that picture! Otherwise, the concepts and skills are back to being taught in isolation. L.A. Shepard, a well-known measurement specialist, writes, “If assessments are focused on narrow and isolated benchmarks, and if students are expected to “master” these narrow skills prior to receiving subsequent instruction, classroom instruction will likely be focused on isolated concepts and skills as well. This notion of teaching small amounts of information and testing at each step is classic behaviorism and this theoretical approach to student learning is no longer considered an effective method for promoting deep and meaningful learning.”

Taken out of context, these statements would seem to indicate that formative assessments should not be administered. However, Shepard goes on to say, “This does not mean that teachers should avoid breaking things into component pieces for students, but when doing so, they should keep the big ideas in mind. Teachers, by regularly returning to the big picture, will help students generate these big ideas.”

So... the bottom line is, when ready to begin a new unit of instruction, teachers should *tell* students what the final outcome will be (even very young students), and continually refer to this final result at each step. Keeping the big picture in focus helps students make the connections, which is necessary for learning to be retained. The big picture provides students an organizing framework, so that concepts and skills can be more readily called upon for later use.