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# The role of learning progressions in global scales



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Learning progressions are valuable tools for the international assessment community. **Ray Adams** reports.

Learning progressions are essential tools for understanding students' progress in their learning. In the classroom, learning progressions enable teachers to identify where students are in their learning and convert student assessment results into meaningful descriptions of their learning progress. This understanding is essential for informing next steps in teaching and learning, to ensure that every student is making progress, whatever their ability.

In Australia, the value of learning progressions as a tool for improving teaching and learning has been endorsed in a recent major report, *Through Growth to Achievement: Report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools*. One of the report's key recommendations is the adoption of learning progressions in Australian classrooms, along with real-time monitoring of student progress. If implemented effectively, this will represent a major step forward in enabling Australian teachers to respond to the diverse range of abilities of students in their classes, and thus help them to ensure that all students are progressing in their learning, irrespective of their starting points.

Another advantage of learning progressions is their ability to bring together multiple forms of assessment. Effective education systems use multiple forms of assessment, including teacher judgments and standardised tests. Each of these assessments should be informed by a clear understanding of how students' learning develops in the relevant domain.

Learning progressions provide a clear conceptual framework with which to interpret results from multiple methods of assessment. They also extend understandings of student learning progress beyond the constraints of year-level curriculum or assessment, which is essential when classrooms may contain students whose learning is far above or below year-level standards.

#### **From the classroom to the global assessment community**

Just as learning progressions can be used in classrooms to understand the learning progress of diverse students, they could also be used by the international assessment community to understand the progress of learners in diverse countries and reach consistent understandings of that progress across international borders.

The Australian Council for Educational Research Centre for Global Education Monitoring (ACER-GEM) is working to develop a global set of learning progressions for use in reporting against Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4: Quality Education. This complements the substantial program of work led by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) and the Global Alliance to Monitor Learning (GAML), to develop strategies for monitoring learning against SDG 4. This program of work includes sophisticated statistical strategies for comparing results from different countries using different assessment programs, as well as conceptual strategies to create shared understandings of reading and mathematics — two of the SDG 4 learning domains. ACER-GEM's work on learning progressions will

help bridge the gap between statistical and conceptual approaches, enabling learning assessment data to be translated into meaningful descriptions of student learning.

#### **Learning progressions**

ACER-GEM has created learning progressions in reading and mathematics. The progressions comprise numerical scales and descriptions of learning progress, from foundational to more advanced levels. For example, the reading progression describes how reading develops from the capacity to extract meaning from print, or the basic ability to identify sounds in spoken language, through to sophisticated levels of comprehension, such as the interpretation of meaning and reflecting on the form or content of a text. At each level, the learning progressions provide an overall skill description (for the relevant domain and for its composite strands), illustrative examples of how skills and knowledge might be operationalised in assessment, and additional commentary to aid understanding. ■

*This article first appeared on Brookings Institution's blog series on learning progressions.*

#### **LINKS**

<https://www.acer.org/in/gem>

[https://research.acer.edu.au/monitoring\\_learning/32/](https://research.acer.edu.au/monitoring_learning/32/)

<https://en.unesco.org/gem-report/sdg-goal-4>

<https://www.globalpartnership.org/blog/measuring-learning-comparison-understanding>