

Make It a FAST Adult Education Class

It's All about Formative
Assessment!

Formative Assessment Cycle



September 2016

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Rationale

This mini grant developed over the course of a year. I had been a participating member in an extended PD opportunity through the New England Literacy Resource Center, NELRC, located in Boston, and the topic was formative assessment. For me, this is a natural fit since I do believe that I use formative assessment on a regular basis in my ABE/HiSET prep class. Formative assessment is the crux of how I teach; how else do I know how to shape my lessons if I do not see where my students are at? How else do my students know that they are making progress? How else do I know what next steps need to be taken to lead my students further in their education? How else do I know they understand the lesson content?

The need for formative assessment in classrooms versus summative assessments was reinforced for me a few weeks back at my third class meeting. This year, I am so fortunate to have true adult learners in my adult education class at Salem Alternative and Continuing Education. It has been years since our adult population far outweighed our youth population. I would say this year the ratio is 15 to 3, and it is FANTASTIC to see the light come on in the adult learners' eyes...it has been pure joy so far, except for when we did our math appraisal.

On our registration night, I spent considerable time with three women who were returning to school. One had been with me last year so she was offering her words of encouragement to these two new women. Both had horror stories of their early years in school, especially in math, and that they were both told in so many words that they would never succeed. One of the ladies left school in seventh grade, and she is the one that highlighted for me the necessity of doing formative assessment rather than a "do all, be all, end all" summative assessment. Formative assessments are very low stress and they show and tell so much about student learning and thinking. Formative assessments can be customized to fit the lesson and take little time away from actual teaching since they are part of the teaching.

During the math appraisal, a summative, she ended up leaving class because she was so stressed. I found her in the bathroom crying. We had a long talk in the bathroom and she told me that all of her fears and anxiety about school came crashing back down on her when she was filling in the bubble sheet. We left the bathroom with confidence about completing the test in a few weeks

after some time had passed and distance had been placed between her and the appraisal, and a promise that she would return, (and she did!)

In thinking back to my first session of the formative assessment course I had taken, I was met with this... I realized at that moment when I was in the bathroom with my student, that I was a terrible chef and that if my entire teaching career had been like this, having my students get so filled with anxiety that they had to leave the classroom, then I would never work in a 5 star restaurant. I saw the destructive power of a summative assessment and it was reinforced for me that formative assessment is the way to go to build up student confidence, ability, and skills in a non-threatening way. (That being said, passing the HiSET is all about passing a summative test, but if we can take small steps to show success towards learning goals, build confidence along the way, practice how to take summative tests, then the summative will not be such a stress inducing experience.)

But by now, you must be wondering what I am talking about, being a chef...please consider the graphic below.



Image taken from: <https://storify.com/ArabicLangchat/6th-arabiclangchat-formative-assessment-ideas>

This really left me scratching my head when I was taking my formative assessment class, but now when I really think about it, it makes perfect sense. As the chef (the teacher in the classroom), I am constantly tasting the soup, (the lesson plan) seeing how much salt to add (remediation, change to the lesson, new strategies and so on), how much more veggies to add (example and explicit instruction, scaffolded learning, and conferencing), and what bowl to serve it in (feedback). Once my guests (students in the classroom) taste the soup, that is when I know I have done my job well, or not, as the chef. If they can successfully complete the summative, whatever high stakes test that might take the form of, then we have worked well together to create a soup that meets everyone's dietary needs (different forms of testing that have been developed fairly to meet the needs of each student to demonstrate mastery of the material).

So, if you want to be a chef in a five star restaurant, keep reading...you will be amazed at how little effort it takes to be a chef that would make Bobby Flay, Gordon Ramsay, Emeril Lagasse and Julia Child proud! Each student in your class should dine on fine soup made by a chef that took the time to know their guests and met all of their needs.



Image taken from: <http://www.happilyfull.com/2013/05/happilyfulls-kitchen-first-time-cooking.html>

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Chapter 1: What is Formative Assessment?



Image taken from: <http://graniteblog2.graniteschools.org/blog/mtss/plcs/common-assessments/>

What is formative assessment? The definition of formative assessment is “the use of informal, ongoing, authentic assessments to generate feedback to improve and accelerate learning.” (TEAL Fact Sheet).

Formative assessment is also a process for making instructional adjustments based on feedback about student performance.

Formative assessment allows the teacher to see each step that the student is taking towards progress as well as each step backwards due to lack of understanding. Formative assessment allows the teacher to see when the student needs help and when they are ready to move along. It is a cycle geared towards student success because both teacher and student are equal partners in the classroom. It is a give and take on the sides of both parties. The teacher teaches, and the student demonstrates learning. When the two are not in sync, then the teacher needs to make adjustments to meet the needs of the student, and the student needs to voice when they are unclear about the learning. In essence, the classroom is seen as a partnership geared towards mutual success.

Formative assessment is for learning as opposed to assessment of learning.

Formative assessment is a form of assessment that uses strategies, techniques, and activities to provide feedback to teachers and students during the course of instruction.

The underlined words in the paragraphs above are the crux of formative assessment. It is a process in which teachers and students actively engage in to improve learning and to make gains towards individual student goals. The use of informal assessments allow for the teacher to make adjustments along the way to their instruction to best meet the needs of all of the students in the class. The end result of this cycle of instruction, informing, supporting, reteaching, feedback, and success continues from class to class.

Formative assessment is something that should be used daily, hourly, and minute by minute to guide instruction. It is through this quick and easy assessment that teachers are able to gauge student learning and understanding. It is a major potential source of evidence of what our students know and what they do not know.

Formative assessment is doing assessment for learning for learning's sake. It is a form of practice for students, and it allows them to see the route that needs to be taken to achieve success and to do this by getting and/or doing better each time.

Formative assessments are given to inform, and never to punish. They are not "pop quizzes" or "I'm gonna getcha moments". Formative assessment is all about guiding where instruction needs to go next and the steps that the teacher needs to take to bring their students where they need to go. It is a process of teaching, reflecting, learning, growing, developing, and deepening learning.

Formative assessment is tightly linked with instructional practices. Teachers need to consider how everything in their class, the content, the activities, the assignments and the tests support the students. If it does not, then change needs to occur. At the end of every prepared lesson, a teacher needs to step back and ask, "What am I trying to teach? How am I making it varied? What are the outcomes for my students when I use this activity? Will I be able to measure progress? Will students be able to see progress?"

Teachers use formative assessment for two reasons: to provide feedback to students about their progress and to guide decisions about the next steps in the learning process. Active decisions based on student outcomes allow for the teacher to meet individual needs and to close educational gaps that are present.

Formative assessments are used as a guiding tool for teachers to shape their teaching and student learning. They are not graded. Formative assessments

are authentic since they are aligned with classroom objectives and these objectives reflect real world applications. Variety is a hallmark of formative assessment.

According to research, there are four essential elements of formative assessment: identifying the gap, feedback, learning progressions and student involvement.

1. Identifying the gap, is the process of defining the difference, the gap, between what students know and what they need to know. Once the gap is identified, focus only on this gap. Gaps have to be worked at one at a time for mastery. Be confident that every student can meet with success.
2. Effective, timely and specific feedback provides the teacher with much needed information regarding the current status of student learning as well as the next steps that need to be taken to improve student learning. Feedback can alert the teacher to any steps that need to be taken to modify instruction. This feedback should be in the form of rich conversations between student and teacher. They need to be led by the student so that their goals are at the forefront of the conversation.
3. Learning progressions, or goals, are used by the teacher to break the learning goal into smaller, manageable parts. This needs to be done in collaboration with the student. The student needs to tell the teacher what their goals are, and not vice versa.
4. Active student involvement means that students need to give input into their own learning, and self-assessment helps students engage in self-reflection about their learning. The goal of this active student involvement is a self-regulated learner.

Lastly, remember, formative assessment is done in short and small “chunks” rather than infrequent long assessments, since that would not be formative assessment, it would be summative assessment. Keep in mind that new learning should be assessed within one week of the first exposure of the new learning. And, be mindful of the quality of the formative assessment. Choose your tool wisely, offer choice if you can, and most importantly, know your students.

The Formative Assessment Process




A process	A one-time thing
Planned	Unplanned
Using evidence to make instructional adjustments and/or verifying learning	Moving on or spending more time on a topic regardless of evidence
Involves giving specific student feedback that is turned into student action	Grading

Image taken from: <http://edge.ascd.org/blogpost/formative-assessment-an-introduction>

Formative Assessment Process

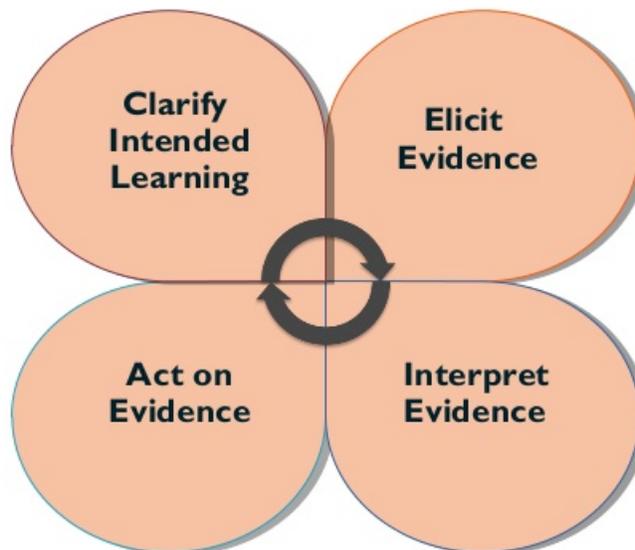


Image taken from: <http://www.slideshare.net/pattystephens/formative-assessment-strategies-nw-math-conference-11-october-2014>

Chapter 2: Why Use Formative Assessment?

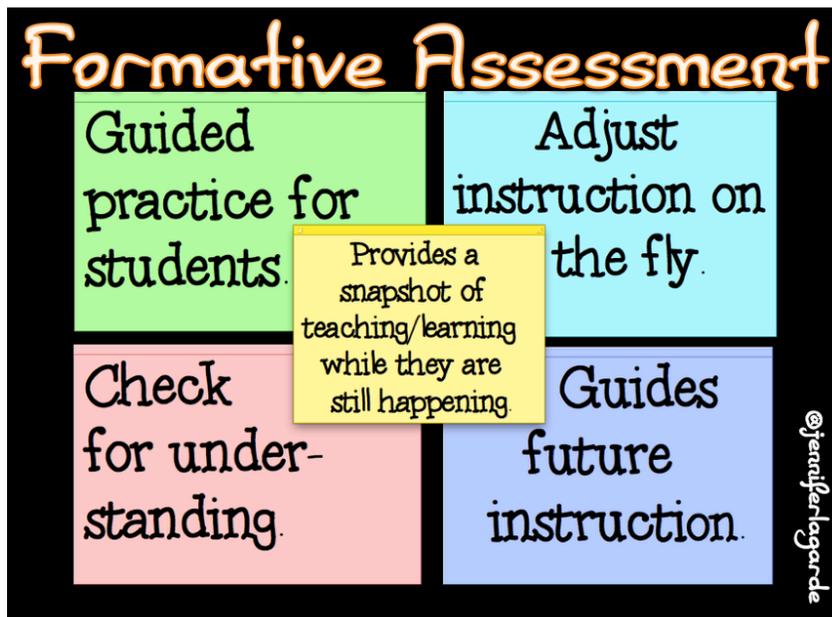


Image taken from: https://sites.google.com/a/alexander.k12.nc.us/achs_it/instructional-technology-tools-and-web-2-0

Formative assessment, in combination with appropriate feedback, can be the most powerful tool for student achievement. Formative assessment helps teachers see where students are, it provides information to guide instruction, it allows the teacher to see where changes need to be made to help students with learning, it drives teachers to create lessons that are appropriate to student needs and abilities, and it informs students on their progress and their attainment of their goals.

Formative assessment is used to:

- ✓ Assist student learning
- ✓ Identify students' strengths and weaknesses
- ✓ Assess the effectiveness of a particular instructional strategy
- ✓ Assess and improve the effectiveness of curriculum programs
- ✓ Assess and improve teacher effectiveness
- ✓ Provide data that assist in decision making
- ✓ Communicate with and involve students in their learning
- ✓ Highlights the needs of each student
- ✓ Provides immediate feedback to both the teacher and student
- ✓ Occurs as a planned and intentional part of the lesson
- ✓ Occurs in the context of the classroom

- ✓ Focuses on growth and progress
- ✓ Supports goal setting within the classroom and for each individual student
- ✓ Reflects both the goals of the teacher and student
- ✓ Answers questions that the teacher has about student learning, growth, and understanding
- ✓ Informs immediate next steps
- ✓ Allows for understanding of the lesson for both teacher and student
- ✓ Focuses on responsibility of both teacher and student
- ✓ It encourages students to assume responsibility for their learning and to engage in self-assessment which will lead to self-regulated learning.

Good formative assessment will provide for students answers to the following questions: Where am I going? Where am I now? How do I get where I am going? How will I know when I get there? Am I on the right track for getting there?

Formative assessment is a “must” in the classroom since it helps students understand “why” they are learning what it is that they are learning as well as where they are to go.

1. **Clarifying, sharing, and understanding learning intentions and criteria for success** which means getting the students to really understand what their classroom experience will be and how their success will be measured.
2. **Engineering effective classroom discussions, activities, and learning tasks that elicit evidence of learning** which means developing effective classroom instructional strategies that allow for the measurement of success.
3. **Providing feedback that moves learning forward** which means working with students to provide them the information they need to better understand problems and solutions.
4. **Activating learners as instructional resources for one another** which means getting students involved with each other in discussions and working groups can help improve student learning.
5. **Activating learners as owners of their own learning** which means having learners see that they can learn and succeed and that they can “own” their learning.

Chapter 3: What are the Principles of Formative Assessment?

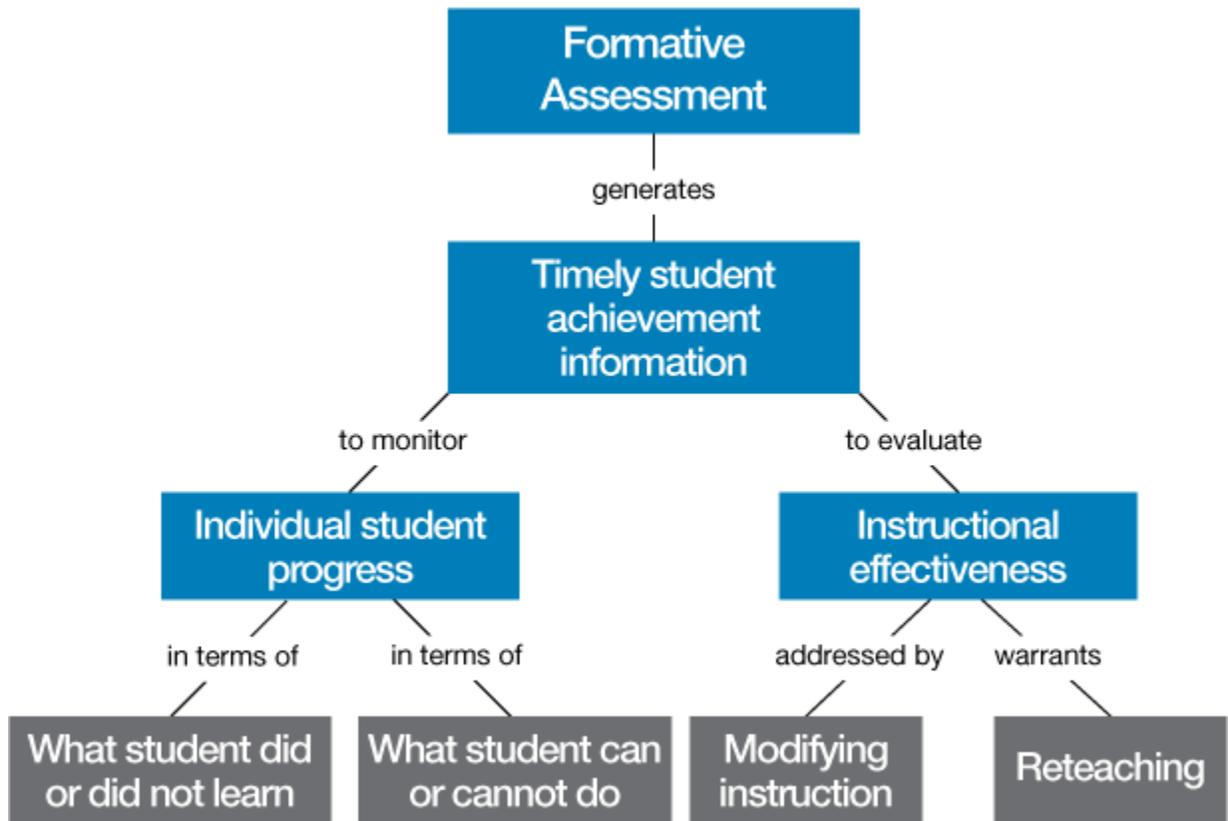


Image taken from: <http://recordingformativeassessment.weebly.com/what-is-formative-assessment.html>

Formative assessments are tools that provide the feedback on student learning. This feedback will guide teacher and student adjustments during learning. According to research, if teachers want the information gathered by these formative tools to have the most impact on student learning, they must design classroom assessments with these five principles in mind:

1. **Target key sub-skills and bodies of enabling knowledge (building blocks) in the learning progression.** In simple terms, this is figuring out the “big picture”. A teacher needs to look at the foundational skill level of the student and then progress from there. Formative assessment allows for this since as the teacher, you are constantly checking where students are at in simple, non-anxiety producing ways. The simplicity of formative assessment can be deceptive in its effectiveness. When looking at a sub-skill, if a student has mastered it, then that student can move on to the next skill. By doing formative assessment frequently, the teacher is constantly assessing, rethinking, retooling, and reteaching to meet the

needs of all of the students. When formative assessment is done as a whole class activity, mastery can be seen quickly and the tempo of the lesson can accelerate or slow down, depending upon the success of the formative assessment with the class.

2. **Target those concepts and skills with which students typically experience difficulty or harbor misconceptions about.** It is prudent to plan formative assessment tasks to confirm or refute misconceptions before moving on to the next lesson. An experienced teacher can almost foresee when these misconceptions will arise, and so before they do, they are able to target the concepts with formative assessment so students do not get “bogged down” in their own misconceptions and result in confusion.
3. **Align with the content provided in related classroom and common summative assessments.** Even though the scope of this mini grant is not to deal with summative assessments, it is not an issue that can be ignored. Summative assessments are in every aspect of adult education: HiSET, Adult High School final exams, and assessment in ESL, from placement tests to the Citizenship test. That being said, what is taught in the class must reflect content that will be taught on these high stakes tests. We will do our students a major disservice if we never expose them to formats like a standardized test. By giving our students practice with summative assessments, our students will be armed with the skills necessary to pass the test because they have knowledge, not because the test was taught to.
4. **Align with the levels of cognitive rigor featured in summative assessments.** Classroom assessments provide meaningful feedback when they not only produce evidence of student knowledge and performance, but also evidence that students can function at the level of cognitive complexity expected on later summative assessments. Therefore, formative assessment tasks must include the levels of cognitive complexity students will see later on. It is important to remember that cognitive complexity is not the same as task difficulty. There is no need to task students with a 20 page paper to see that they know how to write a cohesive essay. By using complex text, (rather than task difficulty), depth of knowledge inquiry, and critical thinking skills, we are preparing our students for the necessary higher order thinking skills to pass any high stakes test they might need to.
5. **Mirror the item formats included in summative assessments.** By having students practice different types of formative assessments we are creating

students who will be flexible test takers of all kinds of tests. It is the knowledge and the preparedness of the student that will bring success. It is the information that students have learned that passes tests. If you couple content knowledge with test taking confidence, then students are armed with the necessary tools to pass any form of summative test. When we can show students what the high stakes test look like, coupled with their skill and content mastery, success is imminent.

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN FORMATIVE AND SUMMATIVE EVALUATION		
INDICATORS	FORMATIVE	SUMMATIVE
Goal	The goal of formative assessment is to improve	The goal of summative assessment is to prove
Purpose	To enhance learning	To make judgements about students' performance
Relation to instruction	Occurs during instruction	Occurs after instruction
Frequency	Occurs on a continuous basis (daily)	Occurs at a particular point of time to determine what students know
Role	To improve learning allows teachers to make decisions and monitor their instructions based on students' performance	To predict & judge students' performance, give grades and determine if the content being taught was retained

Image taken from: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/82472236904098040/>

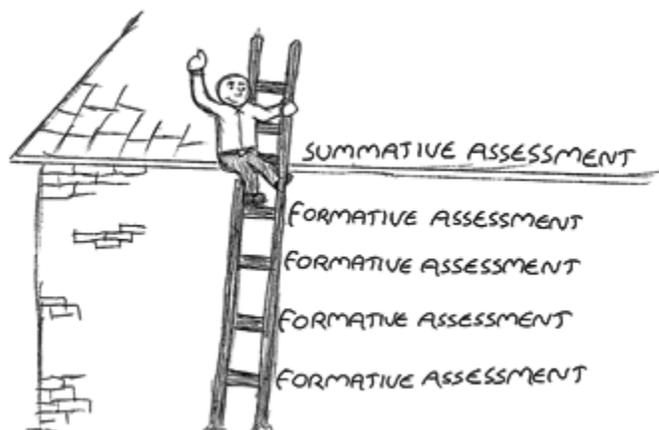


Image taken from: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/417075615468723358/>

Chapter 4: Why Does There Need to be Fair Testing?



Image taken from: <http://fishbowlteaching.blogspot.com/2015/08/why-arent-we-all-on-same-page.html>

All forms of assessment must be fair, which means that “students are given equitable opportunities to demonstrate what they know”. (Suskie) Equitable assessment means that students are assessed using methods and procedures that are most appropriate to them and to their needs. They will vary from one student to the next and from time to time. Students' prior knowledge, cultural experience and cognitive style are to be considered, and these factors also weigh into results and also need to be considered by the teacher.

Regardless of what tool you decide to use to assess, a good assessment tool will always be one that:

- ✓ Gives us useful information. When an assessment is useful, it aligns with learning goals and objectives and your curriculum. If the assessment does not do align, then it should not be used.
- ✓ One that gives us reasonably accurate and truthful information. When an assessment is designed correctly, it will highlight what our students know. This is critical in the design since if the design is not based on the content taught and learned, then how is that information accurate and truthful to you or to the students?
- ✓ Are designed to be fair to students.

- ✓ Are ethical and they are designed to respect our students.
- ✓ Are to be ethical and protect the dignity of our students.
- ✓ Have a systemized way in which they are scored.

There are ten steps to fair assessment and if these steps are followed, student success will increase since they are being given an equitable chance at showing and/or demonstrating what they know and what they have learned.

1. Have clearly stated learning outcomes, and share them with your students.
2. Match your assessment to what you teach and vice versa. Explain what you are looking for and help students develop these skills to meet your expectations.
3. Use many different kinds of measures and many different times. Use variety and use the results to drive your teaching and the changes that need to be made to the lesson(s).
4. Collect more than one kind of evidence when assessing students, meaning, do not do just one kind of assessment all the time. Variety can help you and your students see what has been learned since not every person likes one particular form of assessment. This will give you a representative sample of what your students are able to do, so that if one assessment does not work well with your student(s), you still have other forms of feedback to assess their learning.
5. Help students learn how to do the assessment task. If students do not understand what is being asked of them, how can they demonstrate their learning? Make sure that the test is understood by your students so that they are not trying to figure out the test and answer questions correctly. Have you ever thought of showing the students the test prior to its administration to see if it is clear to them?
6. Engage and encourage your learners. Try out sample tests with students so they can give input into which kind they like and which kind they find difficult.
7. Consider staggering your assessments. Every class is not a good ratio of testing to teaching. Our students want to be engaged in the curriculum and class and not always testing. Figure out different ways to see what students know as compared to formalized tests at every opportunity.
8. Adapt your testing schedule to meet the needs of your students. Consider the time that the test will be administered in the class, the day, how long, when during the class and so on.

9. Interpret assessment results appropriately. Compare students only to themselves and to their past performance. Score them fairly and consistently. Be sure before grading assessments that you know what quality looks like and what you are looking for as a satisfactory output.
10. Evaluate the outcomes of your assessments. If and/or when students do not do well on an assessment, ask them why. This answer typically sheds light on the test outcome.

Please note that a test may be designed well, but there are factors that we can never control. Those factors include coming to the test sick, if the student arrives to the testing situation under duress due to a family crisis, an argument with a significant other, and so on, if a student “blanks out” on the test, if the test happened to cover material that was covered on a day the student was absent, if the test happens to cover material that the student knew particularly well, the student completed the test incorrectly, such as filling in the wrong bubble on the answer sheet and so many other reasons that may make the test results less than what we had hoped for. When this happens, talk with the student. Because you will have been doing formative assessment along the way, a skewed test result usually has a reason behind it. Do yourself a favor, and especially your student, and find out why and work with that. This can be a powerful assessment tool in and of itself.



Image taken from: <https://classroom-assessment-theory-into-practice.wikispaces.com/Integrating+Assessment+for+Learning>

Chapter 5: Checking for Understanding with These Types of Activities that Show Learning



Image taken from: <http://www.afraidtoask.com/rules-of-friendship-8-understanding/>

So, you have now made it to the point where you need to check for student understanding on whatever topic you have taught. How do you go about doing this without falling back on the tried and true multiple guess, fill in the blank, matching kind of tests? The answer is easy! Use formative assessment!

It is always time to be thinking of this, “where was my student at the beginning and where is my student today?” Do not look at yesterday and never look at tomorrow. Look at where they are today, and only look at them...never compare one student with the other. It is counterproductive to all aspects of learning since no one individual is the same as the other.

Formative assessment can take many forms, but it is never standardized. Tasks, activities, projects, checklists, rubrics, written papers, oral presentations, graphic organizers, analysis of work, KWLs and on and on goes the list.

All forms of formative assessment can be monitored easily to see if students understand the content. All of these “checks” can be used to further understanding as well as to hopefully continue the discussion outside of the classroom.

When you use formative assessments, you must keep track of the data that you collect. If you do not, then you will not be able to see the progress that students are making. The easiest way to observe and assess student growth is to observe! This can take many forms, and one way is to walk around the room with a clipboard and sticky notes. As you notice the acquisition of a new skill or confusion and struggle with a skill, record the student's name and jot down a brief comment. Consider keeping a folder for each student in which you insert any notes that you make on a class by class basis. This process will help you

focus on the needs of individual students when you confer with each student or develop lessons for your whole class. Data collection is in the form of “watch, look and listen”. You can learn so much about your students and their personal learning style by just being quiet and watching them do their work. The observation results you will yield will be helpful to your direct teaching.

Here are some approaches for you to consider as formative assessment for your students.

3-2-1 Summary is a strategy that can be used in a variety of ways, including have students list 3 things they learned, two things they still have questions about, and one new idea the learning generated.

3 Minute Pause is a strategy that students can use for self-reflection. In this strategy, students think about these questions:

- ✓ I changed my attitude about...
- ✓ I became more aware of...
- ✓ I was surprised about...
- ✓ I felt that...
- ✓ I related to...
- ✓ I empathized with...

A-B-C Summaries is an easy tool to implement. Each student gets a letter of the alphabet, and they must use that letter to summarize points learned in class.

Application cards can be used like exit slips or as a quick write. In application cards, a student is asked, “how will you apply what you have learned in class today”? This is a powerful tool since we need to strive to have our students see that everything in class has a connection to “real life”. By making them stop and think about this before leaving class, we challenge them to think deeply about the learning that has taken place, and it gives us insight into what changes we need to make to our lesson plans to better help them see the correlation between what is taught in class and the connections to their daily life.

Awards are typically given to someone for something that they did extraordinarily well. In this activity, an individual does not get the award, but the content does. What this means is that you are checking for student understanding by having the student “nominate” the most helpful, or the most important, or the most influential aspect of the content of the lesson.

Collaborative Activities can bring together students so that they have the opportunity to move and/or communicate with others as they develop and demonstrate their understanding of concepts.

Crystal ball is also another activity that can be used to check for assumptions, because you ask the simple question, “what might happen next?”

Cubing is fun and it is easy to do. Develop six questions, or have students develop the questions. When that is done, have students roll a die. The corresponding number on the die goes with the question number. Take turns rolling the die until all questions have been answered.

Defend It is strategy suggests that students take a stance on the learning and identify at least 3 ways to prove or defend it.

Describe It is used to determine conceptual understanding or application of procedures, have students describe the learning or the process.

Discussion among students can be difficult, but if they are nurtured then you can glean lots of information from what students say to each other. It is your “job” to provide students with opportunities to discuss understanding to one another in pairs, small groups and large groups. This can be done with ready-made prompts or by prompts generated by the students. When given some direction, students can delve deeply into the content if they can take the time to express themselves.

Easy Breezy can be used when we want students to create a short commercial illustrating what comes rather easy to them regarding learning particular portions of the content.

Entry slips can be used before a lesson, and this can be used to check for prior knowledge as well as assumptions about the content. Entry slips are an excellent entry point into the lesson since it helps to frame the content that will be covered in the class.

Exit slips are a tried and true method for checking for understanding and one that is so simple. Exit slips allow for closure on the class as well as provide for the teacher a short list of what the students learned, where they are not sure, and what needs to happen in the next class to reinforce learning.

Find 2 Who... is a way for students to collaborate with other learners helps students make connections. Students can find 2 others who are confused about a particular point, who made similar revelations, who know how to solve certain steps, etc. and work with that student to make connections.

Found poems are a tool in which the students are demonstrating that they get the main idea, that they get what the content reading is all about. For this activity, students need to rearrange something that they have read or written, but the caveat is, they cannot add new words. Every word they use must come out of the reading material or their own written words.

Graphic organizers are plentiful on the web. Find one that meets your needs for the lesson at hand and that will work well with your students.

Has Your Thinking Changed? Is a great way to find out what students thought before or after learning. This can be used with reading, writing, vocabulary, math, science or social studies. It is to be used as a pre and post assessment. Prior to learning, have students write out what they think of the topic. After the learning has occurred, pose the question, "has your thinking changed?"

Headline/Breaking News is a way for students to advertise their learning through a headline or breaking news caption to alert others will force students to broadcast the most important concept.

Journaling is one technique that I struggle with personally. For many of my students, they are uncomfortable with sharing so requiring a journal is an undue stressor. When students can choose the journaling option that becomes a very powerful tool. Journaling can allow a quiet student to open up and share thoughts that they are not comfortable sharing in a large group setting. Once again, know your students and know their comfort level in sharing with you.

K-W-L is a classic...we all know what to do here! What do students know, what do they want to learn, and what did they learn. Simple and yet effective!

Let's Vote is one way to engage all students. Have students write down an answer. After enough time has elapsed for thoughtful responses, read aloud a few. (Please give students fair warning that they will be asked to have their responses read aloud.)

Lists, Charts, and Graphic Organizers are ways in which students can organize information, make connections, and note relationships through the use of various graphic organizers.

Make It Real is a process through which we are asking students to describe how the learning transfers and applies to real life applications will help teachers determine the levels of understanding.

Map It is a strategy that is great for content that can represent through graphic organization. Identifying main ideas and details, sequencing, and processes are excellent choices for mapping. Furthermore, when students have

opportunities to select the appropriate form of mapping themselves, they gain greater ownership of the content.

Misconception Check provides students with common or predictable misconceptions about a specific principle, process, or concept. Ask them whether they agree or disagree and explain why. Also, to save time, you can present a misconception check in the form of multiple-choice or true/false.

Muddiest point technique is a great way to clear up what is muddy. We all know the old adage, "It's as clear as mud", well this lends light to that. When you have students work individually, in pairs, or in small groups, concretely pointing out what is muddy helps to guide instruction as well as clear steps to uncover why this particular point is muddy.

Observations are a method that may sound a little old school, but it works! When teachers conscientiously observe student body language/facial expressions, listen in on student discussions, and simply pay attention to their students, they can fairly ascertain how much learning is being caught.

One-on-one interviews are a great way for students to see connections. This form of probing for understanding can be done using problem-solving situations. Set up questions or scenarios to see how much students know about a topic and give them wait time to come up with an answer to the question(s) in the interview.

One Question, One Comment is a great tool to facilitate small group discussion since students are directed to give a question or comment and it is a volley back and forth between members until all questions and comments are exhausted.

One-Sentence Summary comprises of asking students to write a summary sentence that answers the "who, what where, when, why, how" questions about the topic.

One-Word Summary is on the same idea as one-sentence summary, but in this strategy, students only use one word to summarize all of the learning that has occurred.

Peer assessments are tricky...many of our students have met with such failure that they are not ready to assess someone else, nor do they feel they have the skills to do so. Of all the formative assessment tools that are available, I steer clear of this one, but again, this may be one which would work well for you.

Picture It is as simple as it sounds... if students can draw, doodle, diagram, or scribble it, they show what they know.

Presentations can be tricky since many of our students do not like to do public speaking. Please, know your audience and gauge your students' ability to do this. Presentations do not have to be formal. You can provide students opportunities to conduct a survey and then present the data to the class. Technology can be used in a multitude of ways to allow for presenting without actually "presenting" in front of the class.

Questioning if well-planned, thoughtful questions focused on high cognitive skills can help teachers determine during the course of the lesson how well students are acquiring content knowledge. Furthermore, teachers can discern a lot about the acquisition of knowledge by the questions students generate.

Quick Write can be used as a pre and/or post tool. What is so easy about this is that it is not a large or demanding writing task. For this to work, students need only write for 1-3 minutes on the topic. Surprisingly, this is enough time to determine what a student knows and what they are uncertain about.

Rename It is a strategy that requires students to demonstrate their understanding by giving the learning concept a new name and explaining why the new identification is appropriate.

Response Logs are a journal of sorts. Response logs require students to respond to a series of prompts in which they reflect on how well they are learning content.

Self-assessment is fantastic! When students engage in self-assessment, they truly take a look at their learning outcomes based on a rubric, hopefully one they had input in or created, and they can clearly align their learning with what is concretely stated.

Shape Up Review has the students provide information for corresponding shapes. For example, the shapes could be used in the following ways: square: three main ideas; heart: one thing you loved; circle: a continuous truth; puzzle: something that is confusing.

Stick It is a process by which students will create a bumper stick that summarizes the learning succinctly will demonstrate concrete understandings.

Solve It is a formative assessment that has the students figure out a related riddle or conundrum for inferencing, problem- solving for mathematics, or contextual situations for social sciences is a great way to have students apply learned procedures.

Student checklists allow your students to self-assess. Collect the checklists with each, or every other, new idea during a unit of study. Make sure they write a sentence or two explaining how they know they've got it, or why they think they are still struggling.

Student Reflection works best when students engage in critical thinking. Some questions that can be asked are: what was your task, ultimate goal, or the outcome for this activity? What are some important concepts and ideas that you discovered/learned? Why are these concepts or ideas important? How did you solve the problem or task? Did you reach your goal? Would you make changes and why?

Summaries and Reflections allow students to stop and reflect, make sense of what they have heard or read, derive personal meaning from their learning experiences, and/or increase their metacognitive skills. These require that students use content-specific language.

Text It/Tweet It uses limited characters—like Twitter’s constraint of 140—summarize the essential learning.

Text Support requires to students to find at least 3 examples of textual support and evidence for content conversations is a create way to promote re-reading strategies and deepen students’ understanding.

The Three-Minute Paper is a low stress way to get students to write. At any time in the lesson, give students a prompt in which they will write for only three minutes. You will be amazed at how much output is produced, and with little anxiety.

Think-Pair-Share allows students to discuss their thinking about a question or topic in pairs or small groups. A representative is asked to “report out” the findings of the group.

Thumbs Up-Thumbs Down is a quick way to determine if students understand the material. Thumbs up means “yes, I get it” and thumbs down means, “no, I don’t get it.”

Tic-tac-know is simple if your students know how to do tic-tac-toe. There are variations to this strategy, and you can develop ways to use this that work with your students. You can create the tic-tac-know asking student to pick 3 items on the board to demonstrate learning, or you can have students create a tic-tac-know based as a summary of learning in which they develop nine questions on the board, which they know the answers to, and then they give it to someone else in the class to answer tic-tac-know.

Top 5 is easy to do since students list their top 5 concerns, interests, questions, or the top 5 components, features, ideas, steps, and so on, related to content.

Visual Representations of Information allows for students to use both words and pictures to make connections and increase memory, facilitating retrieval of information later on. This "dual coding" helps teachers address classroom diversity, preferences in learning style, and different ways of "knowing."

Warm-Ups provide questions, problems, sequences, defining, reordering, etc., tasks that either pre-assess prior knowledge for new concept or review content prior to instruction.

Word Sort is a great way to introduce new vocabulary, content or themes in a lesson. Give students key words that will be covered in the content of the class and have them group them by category. Have students give the category a name. Compare results with the class.

Yesterday's news is a quick way for students to recall what happened in the previous class. This one can be tricky since many of adult education classes have gaps between. For a diploma class, they meet only once a week. What a great way to see what students remember! As the teacher, it also makes us remember, what did I teach?!?

Lastly, the hope of all teachers is that the discussion will continue outside of class. Give your students opportunity to think, talk, reflect, and debate about what occurred within the class. They are reinforcing their learning and they are developing critical thinking skills as well. The more we can get our students to think, to talk, to process, to question, to engage, and to synthesize, the deeper the learning and the deeper the connections are made to learning in the classroom and application to the real world.



Image taken from: <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/20141120081352-26507372-understanding-the-relationship-between-branding-identity-logo-design>

Chapter 6: Essential Questions to Deepen Student Thinking

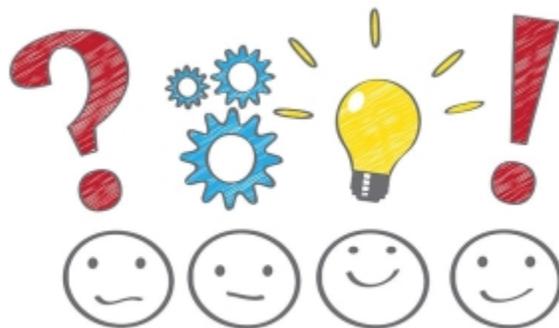


Image taken from: <https://community.uservice.com/blog/customer-interview-questions/>

When working with students, it is essential that you work on deepening student thinking. Our job is not skill and drill, but in deepening the connection between what is taught in class and how it can be applied in the “real world”. Our teaching does not end at the end of class...this is just the beginning. It is a testament to powerful learning when the conversation does not end because the class did.

In helping your students gain skills in the area of deepening their thinking, try out these strategies.

Remember Wait Time I and II. Provide at least five seconds of thinking time after a question AND after a response.

Call on students randomly. Avoid the pattern of calling on only those that raise their hands.

Use probes and follow ups. Why? Can you explain? Do you agree? How do you know? Give an example.

Cue responses to open-ended questions. State: There is not a single correct answer to this question. I want you to consider alternatives.

Ask students to “unpack” their thinking. Ask: Describe how you arrived at your answer.

Periodically ask for summaries. Summarize the key points of _____ thus far (the text, the speaker, the film, the discussion.)

Play devil's advocate. Require students to defend their reasoning against different points of view.

Survey the class. How many people agree with _____(this idea, the author's point, the conclusion?)

Pose metacognitive and reflective questions. How do you know what you know? How did you come to understand this? How might you show that you understand?

Encourage student questioning. Ask students to generate questions.

Use Think-Pair-Share. Allow thinking time and discussion with a partner, then open up for a class discussion.



Image taken from: <http://launchany.com/10-questions-your-api-document-must-answer/>

Chapter 7: Conferencing with Learners



Image taken from: <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/framing-conversation-paul-alex-prince-iii>

Conferencing with students is powerful. This is a time where you can be with a student one-on-one to look at their work, provide feedback, and have a discussion about their work, both the positive aspects of their work as well as what needs more support.

The steps to a successful conference are:

- ✓ Sit side-by-side with the student since this is a one-on-one strategy that directly targets what one specific student needs.
- ✓ Make the conference feel like a conversation. It is a time where you can find out “hidden treasures” about your student's ability or abilities.
- ✓ Let the learner take the lead and introduce their work to you.
- ✓ Know the student's work. Look at past work to compare where the student was and where they are now. Keep a portfolio of best work to be referenced when a student hits a plateau.
- ✓ Be patient. Be respectful of the silence and let the learner speak and take the lead.
- ✓ Go slow, be careful, and take into consideration the learning ability and level of the student.

- ✓ Find out from the student what they need from you to help them improve their work. Ask open-ended questions to get the student willing and able to articulate what it is that they need help with. Ask follow up questions as needed.
- ✓ Look for the teachable moment, and only focus on one or two areas at a time. More than that is overwhelming as well as discouraging.
- ✓ Provide immediate feedback on both the positive aspects as well as where work needs to happen.
- ✓ Demonstrate a strategy, if need be, to help the student make progress on the work at hand. This is a format for direct teaching to meet the needs of the student.
- ✓ Work on providing immediate clarifications.
- ✓ The goal in a conference is not to fix the student's work, but to work at getting the student to understand the material at hand. Keep in mind that the goal of the conference is to help the student, not fix the work in front of you.
- ✓ Keep the conference short, 5-7 minutes. Feel free to use a timer if this will not make your student uncomfortable.
- ✓ Keep the conference positive.
- ✓ Encourage your student to redo, revise, and revisit the work at hand.
- ✓ End with a few action items for the student to work on. Feel free to put these action items in writing so they can reference them. Be sure that the student is able to do the action items. Be sure to teach what needs to be taught so the student will be able to work independently.
- ✓ Keep the conference non-threatening.



Image taken from: <https://www.glassdoor.co.uk/Photos/Avenues-The-World-School-Office-Photos-IMG860533.htm>

Chapter 8: Student Self-Evaluation



Image taken from: http://www.john-paul.talktalk.net/self_evaluation.htm

Student self-evaluation, when it is first presented, can be a problem since many of our adult education students did not meet with success in traditional school. Many of our students have “stories” of failure and then when we ask them to self-evaluate, they may go into full blown panic mode.

Self-evaluation is not meant to produce anxiety, worry, or negative self-thoughts. Rather, it is meant for a student to begin to look at their own work with an eye for what they have done well, and where they need support. It is not an opportunity for them to berate themselves and tell themselves, “I told you so...I can’t do school!”

When bringing up the subject of self-evaluation, insist that it is one way to learn about themselves and where they are at. It is going to take some encouragement on your part, but with this encouragement, your student can and will learn to assess their work through the lens of “I can do this!”

In self-assessment, students reflect on and monitor their own learning through the use of clearly explained criteria, such as with a rubric, and then the students make concrete steps to improve their learning. Keep in mind that if you decide to use rubrics, they need to be clearly designed for the specific task it is to be used for. Rubrics are meant to be holistic tools that are to be used as an instructional tool, not as a skills assessment. Advise students to not just focus on one part of the rubric but on the entire framework to guide their work. Work with students when you give a rubric so they know what has the most “weight” and where they should be putting forth the most effort. When possible, design the

rubrics that will be used with your students. This is a powerful activity that clearly shows student understanding of what quality work is and what it looks like.

There is a three step reflection process that they can engage in and it is:

1. What did I do well?, which can be seen as self-judgment. This is not negative, but rather positive. This is when the student sees their work product and can say to themselves, "I know how to do this. I am successful. My hard work brought about these results."
2. What might I improve?, which can be seen as learning targets and self-adjustments. This is when a student needs to ask or figure out what strategies will help increase learning. The onus is on the student to ask for help so that they may improve towards their learning goals.
3. What resources were most helpful to me?, which can be seen as self-monitoring. This is when a student has awareness of their learning strengths and what works best for them to learn. This is where our students start to become independent learners and they start to self-regulate their learning.

When students get this three step process, they see that there are no steps in the process for "beating themselves up". It is solely a process of looking at their work, assessing what they did well, highlighting areas that need improvement and then pointing out the resources that were helpful to them. The third step is key since it clearly stresses what was helpful to them, and that hopefully they will remember these resources and use them again, when posed with a similar situation.

When a student can successfully self-evaluate their work, which means that they understand the learning objectives and the assessment criteria, they are one step closer to becoming a self-regulated learner, which is a learner who knows how to start a task, plan for the task, make the plans come to fruition and bring the project to success. This is the goal of all learners!

For self-evaluation to work, students need continued practice assessing their own learning, discovering their own learning preference, and implementing metacognitive practices that last a lifetime. Whenever possible, students should review their own responses for accuracy and misconceptions and discover how to improve upon their own work. When this can happen, lifelong learners are created!

Chapter 9: Teacher Feedback

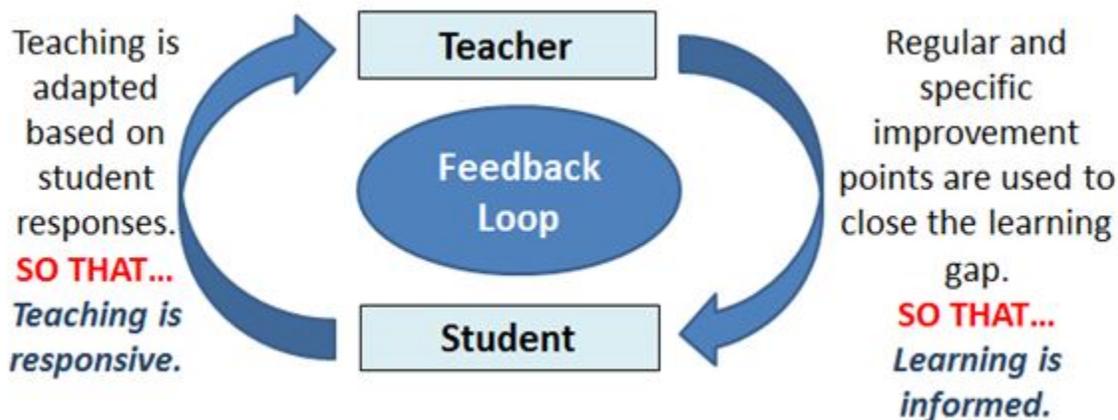


Image taken from: <https://classteaching.wordpress.com/2014/10/19/tft14-feedback-matters/>

Feedback is critical to success in the use of formative assessment. Without this integral step, students cannot figure out what or where their gaps are. A gap exists when there is a break between the desired goal of the student and their current knowledge, understanding, or skill. With the use of feedback, steps can be laid out to help students figure out the actions that are necessary to meet their goals. Feedback needs to answer these questions: "Where am I going? Where am I now? How can I close the gaps?"

The most helpful form of feedback is specific, timely, and task-focused. Specific comments about their errors and specific comments or suggestions to guide them to the correct solution are fundamental to the learning process. By providing specific feedback, students are able to be thoughtful about their revised responses and encourage them to get back on task rather than just looking for the correct answer. Task-focused feedback allows the students the opportunity to talk about the next steps.

Feedback that directs students to look at their thinking is the ultimate goal since this process can help students see that they are in control of their success rather than just trying to hit the target with the correct answer. Teachers need to be sure that they are guiding their student to increase their thinking and deepen their learning and that they are not just striving to get the right answer. Striving to get students to see that their effort is directly related to meeting academic goals is much more beneficial to them than just guessing to find the correct answer.

Feedback needs to be centered solely on the individual student that you are working with. Feedback is never to be done to compare one student with another. When giving feedback, the goal is to look for the “teachable moment”. The goal is not to look for all the errors, but to look at the development of understanding through the feedback process. The feedback process is shaped around the need to enduring understanding. The focus should not be on surface features, what is right and wrong, but on understanding of the content. Feedback should be looked at as a way to improve the “object”, which can take the shape of many outcomes, such as the writing piece, the summative assessment, the project and so on.

Timely, specific and task-focused feedback can:

- ✓ Bridge understanding from expert (teacher) to novice (student).
- ✓ Scaffold metacognitive strategy use, which means choosing the correct strategy that will demonstrate to students how or why they are thinking in such a way.
- ✓ Focus on forms/models and language choices appropriate to academic literacy.
- ✓ Provide individualized, personalized instruction.
- ✓ Demonstrate for you that you need to differentiate your instruction based on the information you have gathered. Ask yourself, "Who needs my attention now? Which students need a different approach? Which students are not learning anything new, because I haven't challenged them?"
- ✓ Reinforce instruction given in whole group settings.
- ✓ Tier you instruction for different levels of abilities that may be in your class. Provide different forms of the same material so students are free to choose which works for them.
- ✓ Provide corrective as well as enrichment activities to support all the learners in your class.

A caveat to quality feedback is that it does take time and it may at times feel like a burden. To help combat this, feedback that is intermittent works well. Do not feel that everything needs to be graded, since it does not since you are using formative assessment as often as possible to assess where students are at. When doing tasks of length, respond to the work in progress. This is where students will need the guidance, not on the final draft. Where they are coming from is so much more important than what the final outcome looks like. Also to keep in mind, the teacher does not always have to be the one giving the feedback. Authentic feedback from peers can be powerful. Use this tool when you have a supportive, caring, and trusting classroom environment.



Image taken from: <https://blog.marketculture.com/tag/patient-feedback/>

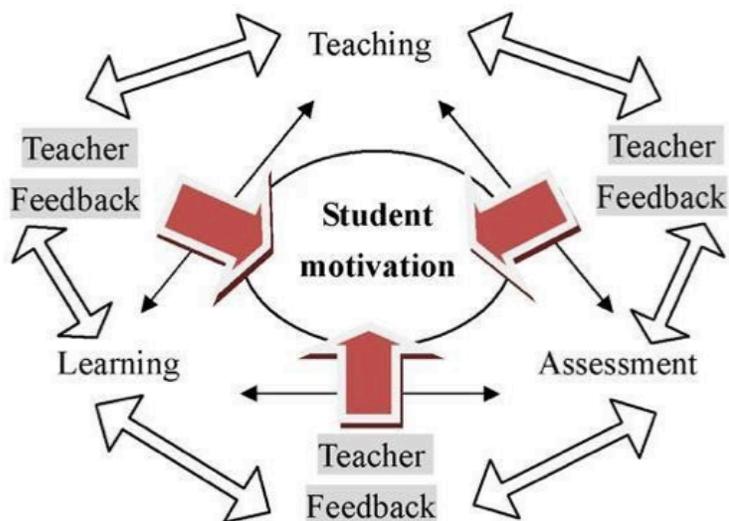


Image taken from: http://www.mextesol.net/journal/index.php?page=journal&id_article=562

Formative Assessment Tip #4



“Effective *feedback* occurs during the learning, while there is still time to act on it.”

-Jan Chappuis



Image taken from: <http://interactiveachievement.com/tag/descriptive-feedback-formative-assessment/>

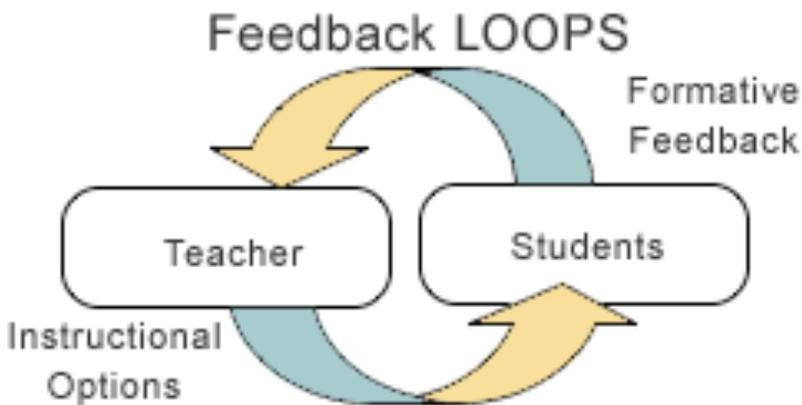


Image taken from: <https://concord.org/projects/loops>

Conclusion

As you can see, formative assessment is taking good classroom practice and putting it into action. It is not putting more work on you as a teacher...in fact, formative assessment is a way to lessen your load. It takes all of the guess work out of teaching since you can concretely see what it is that your students need to learn.

When you take a step back from teaching and implement formative assessment, you are actually engaging in self-reflection of your own practice. When teachers take the time to sit and reflect on why it is they are doing a particular thing, they are engaging in critical thinking themselves. It is for the students' benefit that teachers take the time it takes to think about the why and the how in regards to their lesson plan.

All teachers want their students to succeed, and the best way to ensure this is to teach a lesson, do formative assessment, assess where you had planned to go with the next steps of the lesson, revise your lesson plan as needed, teach, and then repeat this cycle. Formative assessment is a cyclical process that will engage all learners since you are meeting them where they need to be.

I had the privilege in taking part in a year-long project in regards to formative assessment and it solidified for me the importance of doing formative assessment. I was already doing formative assessment; I just was not calling it that. I think most teachers are already well versed in formative assessment but it gets lost along the way due to the need to prepare our students for summative tests, in whatever form it takes. That being said, do not do your students a disservice and teach only to the test. They will not learn, and by this I mean, they will not learn to love learning. They will learn content, but they will not be engaged in learning and in becoming lifelong learners. When we use formative assessment we are challenging our students to think creatively and critically. We are asking them to apply their learning and to make connections. We are challenging them to think outside the box. All of these skills are necessary for life, which is the ultimate goal of learning. We must show our students the why or how in regards to using content learned in class to when they will use it in the real world. When we engage our students in formative assessment, we are "forcing" them to make these connections. With the preparedness of formative assessments and the development of knowledge, our students will be armed with what they need to pass summative assessments.

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