

Introduction to Formative Assessment

Transcript for the online video from CSAI

Welcome to An Introduction to Formative Assessment.

Formative assessment is...

...an ongoing process that teachers and students use during the course of instruction to understand where students are in their learning and to take immediate action to close any gaps. Research shows that formative assessment can have powerful effects on student learning. It provides both teachers and students with real-time information about how learning is progressing.

Continuous feedback and adjustments in instruction enables all students to attain lesson learning goals. Waiting until the end of a lesson to find out that students have not met their goals is too late; instead, formative assessment encourages continuous feedback loops to support student success. Students are equal stakeholders in the formative assessment process.

Formative assessment encourages students to be responsible for their own learning and to contribute to the learning of others through peer and self-assessment. This approach is consistent with traditional indigenous education where partnership learning was key. Teachers often reinforced that they were also learning from students. They used this approach to empower and entrust students with the future of their people.

Effective formative assessment doesn't just happen.

Instead it needs to be pre-planned process, an essential aspect of lesson planning. The formative assessment process involves a set of 4, inter-related elements that teachers integrate into their daily lessons.

These 4 interrelated elements are:

- Establishing Learning Goals and Success Criteria
- Gathering evidence of student progress toward the goals and success criteria
- Analyzing that evidence
- Taking immediate pedagogical action based on evidence

Students too are involved through peer and self assessment.

While considering the 4 elements of the formative assessment process, it is also instructive to consider what Formative assessment is not.

It is not:

- A particular kind of test or instrument
- More frequent use of tests
- A score
- A one-time event
- Something that happens at the end of a period of learning, or
- Something that only teachers do.

A way to think about the process for formative assessment is to consider three key questions that formative assessment answers for teachers and students alike

- Where are students going?
- Where are students now?
- Where to next?

These are three questions that teachers and students answer during teaching and learning to guide the process of formative assessment.

The question, *Where are students going?* Is answered by establishing learning goals and success criteria.

Learning Goals and Success Criteria focus on what learning is expected and how the teacher and students will evaluate whether it has been achieved. In other words, Learning Goals and Success Criteria help teachers and students identify where they are going.

Student learning is more successful when students understand what they are expected to learn, what a successful performance looks like, how to assess their learning against shared criteria, and how to make necessary adjustments to their learning.

The practice of Gathering Evidence begins to answer the question: *Where am I now?*

Teachers and students gather evidence of where learning stands during a lesson. Evidence is gathered through tasks and activities designed to elicit evidence of student thinking, deliberate and planned questioning strategies that help make student thinking visible, and student self-assessment.

The question of *Where am I Now?* is more fully answered when the evidence is analyzed.

When teachers and students analyze the evidence, they can identify where gaps may lie. Once they have an understanding of students' learning status during the lesson, they can make a decision about what the next steps should be to advance learning. This includes identifying any misunderstandings, misconceptions or other gaps in learning.

Taking Pedagogical Action answers the question: *Where to Next?*

Teachers can make adjustments to instruction in real-time either for the whole class, particular groups of students, or individuals. They also can provide descriptive feedback, which can have a positive impact on student learning when it offers actionable suggestions for moving forward and time is provided for students to act upon the suggestions.

Students can also provide feedback to each other that improves learning when they are given explicit structures, guidance, and routines for doing so. When students are engaged in self-assessment, they can make adaptations to their learning tactics in order to make continued progress.

Then the process begins again with new learning goals and success criteria that builds upon prior learning. Now let's look at these formative assessment elements all together in an example.

In this example, a Native language instructor is having students practice oratory. The Learning Goal is to memorize and present a traditional speech in their Native language. The success criteria is to memorize and present a traditional speech clearly, using appropriate posture, and the correct rhythm to facilitate audience responses.

Students learn this through various means...such as memorizing a written document, watching the teacher or another community member as they present, and reviewing recordings of model performances. A period of practice also serves as an evidence gathering opportunity for the teacher and students themselves.

The teacher listens as students practice and he interprets this evidence to determine what pedagogical action he needs to take. In this case, he decides it is to provide individual feedback and model aspects of the oratory for the class as a whole in areas where many students have shown they need support.

Students also use the practice sessions as an opportunity for self-assessment in relation to the success criteria. Since they know what is expected of them, they can more easily adjust their performances to meet them.

Students also practice presenting in front of a peer. Students receive feedback from peers on both their strengths and areas for growth based on the success criteria.

Now let's pause and reflect. How does this conception of formative assessment square with your current thinking on formative assessment and your school's current thinking? Think of a lesson you taught recently. Did you include any formative assessment practices? If so, which ones? If not, why was that? Pause the video while you reflect on these questions with peers or on your own.

Thank you! You have completed the Formative Assessment Introductory module.

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