

The Power of Evidence Use in Formative Assessment

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When we talk about advanced formative assessment practice as **the ability to use evidence to guide learning**, we know that it is not as simple as it may seem. It is predicated on having a clear idea of the intended learning and a vision of what it looks like when it is achieved. It demands a solid grounding in evidence itself, i.e., understanding evidence as that which can be seen and heard in relation to the learning goal *during learning*. And it involves deliberately paying attention, really noticing in the moment, the emerging and unfolding aspects of learning itself as students speak, make, and write. The foundation on which this practice is built is a mental model of the learning, including what came before the moment of noticing, a clear picture of where it is now, and a sense of where it's going next. This wider lens is necessary for teachers and students to respond effectively to emerging learning and support it to move to the next level.

Most importantly, the ability to enact these aspects of advanced formative assessment practice should be held by both teachers and students *and* be applied daily - both to support one's own learning and the learning of others.

This process can be distilled down to the three-beat process of eliciting, interpreting, and responding to evidence. We often say formative assessment provides students with the skills and mindsets *to learn how to learn*. But what does that really look like for students? The four most straightforward ways students engage with evidence in this work is by monitoring their own learning (self-assessment), giving feedback to their peers, participating in discourse to extend their thinking, and co-constructing success criteria. Through these processes, students use evidence to clarify expectations and to make sense of the status of learning as it is underway.

As students begin to learn this work, teachers support them by using iterative instructional routines that include variations of the sequence: *explicit instruction, modeling, rehearsal, practice, and feedback*. Teachers also respond to evidence through deliberate acts of teaching, allowing students to move their learning forward through ongoing nudging, prompting, questioning, supporting, and sharing of

resources. In this way, teachers flatten the power dynamics of their classrooms and become partners in learning.

When teachers engage in these iterative processes, they also deliberately create a culture of learning that promotes trust, openness, and shared responsibility. By seeing learning as it is emerging and developing, teachers and students are looking for how ideas are understood and expressed, rather than what students get right or wrong. This fosters a sense of trust that encourages students to honestly assess their own learning status. With this in place, integrated routines such as peer feedback and discourse become ways for students to learn from one another. Students value one another's knowledge, and support one another with the appropriate level of challenge, as they work towards understanding the learning goal in tandem. This comes about through cultivating a culture that supports students to engage in learning based on what they know.

This asset-based approach guides lesson-planning, individual conferring time, and student-to-student interactions, and is made possible when students are given the opportunity to explore the kinds of learning that help them, including ways of working independently and with peers. Through this, students generate evidence of, and come to know, their own unique qualities and gifts. They become known for these by their peers and are supported in developing them further. Teachers and students also work together to leverage these gifts as they cultivate academic identities and competencies.

Through this process, students and teachers come to value learning the work together and generating collective understanding based on what each person brings uniquely to the learning experience. Ultimately in advanced formative assessment practice, teachers and students shift their conception of learning itself to be one that arises out of, and promotes, collective knowledge.