

Respond to (Evidence of) Student Learning

Formative assessment prepares both students and teachers to succeed in the teaching and learning process. When teachers and students successfully engage in learning, then a focus is placed on student growth and achievement can reach new heights.

by Sandra L. Love, Ed.D.

- *Where are students in their learning?*
- *How do students know if they are learning?*
- *What guides the learning?*

These questions and more can be answered with a process called formative assessment.

Formative assessment focuses on gathering information about student learning and using that information to increase student achievement. Incorporating formative instructional practices to gather and respond to evidence of student learning during daily instruction is non-negotiable. The formative assessment process is a purposeful, planned part of instruction that moves learning forward.



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Set learning targets.

For formative assessment to be effective, learning targets (what students should know and be able to do) must first be established. A focus is placed on the targets as this is what is to be learned and is also what drives teaching and learning. Both students and teachers need to know where the learning is going. The learning targets are not a secret, but should be made clear to all if the intended goal is to be reached.

Gather real-time evidence.

As instruction takes place, teachers seamlessly weave in ways to gather real-time evidence of student learning. These informal and formal ways to elicit evidence include questioning, graphic organizers, analogy prompts, visual representations, turn-and-talk prompts, tasks, and quick writes. Learning evidence is used by teachers and students. Teachers use this documented evidence to guide and make positive instructional changes; students use the gathered evidence to discover where their learning is at present and to determine the progress made toward the learning targets.

Give feedback.

The evidence itself provides the basis for student feedback. Students use feedback to determine if their learning is showing student growth toward the learning targets. Students will quickly know if their learning is not on track and will have a timely opportunity to move in the appropriate direction to reach success. Without this feedback and evidence, students may misunderstand instruction, not be aware that gaps exist in their learning, and be unsure what step to take next.

Share responsibility for learning.

During the process of formative assessment, students share in the responsibility for learning. They participate in self-assessment and peer assessment: sharing feedback, setting goals, and reflecting on learning. Evidence of learning guides students to determine what they need to do in order to be successful in reaching the learning targets.

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