The 5 Formative Assessment Strategies to Improve Student Learning

In Dylan Wiliam’s new book, *Embedded Formative Assessment*, he provides the 5 strategies that he has come to believe are core to successful formative assessment practice in the classroom:

1. **Clarifying, sharing, and understanding learning intentions and criteria for success** – 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** – developing effective classroom instructional strategies that allow for the measurement of success.

3. **Providing feedback that moves learning forward** – 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** – 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** – getting students to become owners of their own learning can not only help students take responsibility for their own learning, but can lead directly to improved student performance.

A free webinar by Dylan Wiliam emphasizing the clear understanding of formative assessment and giving some practical strategies is available at: http://info.nwea.org/FY2012WinterCampaignKLTWebinarOn-demandRegistration.html?

Information from this article is from the Northwest Evaluation Association website: http://www.nwea.org/

When the cook tastes the soup, that’s formative;
when the guests taste the soup, that’s summative.

- R. Stake
Academic Vocabulary and the Common Core State Standards

The Common Core Standards for English Language Arts emphasize the teaching of academic vocabulary (Tier 2 Words). As defined by Isabel Beck in *Bringing Words to Life*, academic vocabulary includes:

- Words likely to appear frequently in a wide variety of texts/disciplines (utility and importance)
- Words necessary for understanding a text and which allow for rich representation (instructional potential)
- Words that relate to other words and offer students more precise ways of referring to ideas they already know about (conceptual understanding)

Consider the following questions when determining which Tier 2 Words to choose for instruction:

- How generally useful is the word? Is it a word that students are likely to see often in other texts? Will it be of use to students in their own writing?
- How does the word relate to other words or ideas that the students know or have been learning?
- What does the word choice bring to the text? What role does the word play in communicating the meaning of the context in which it is used?


Figurative Language Fun and Synonym Switch!

**Figurative Language Fun:**
Help students realize that for some phrases in the English language the meaning is not literal. Discuss idiomatic expressions to increase comprehension.

- Begin by posting a few phrases on the board like *mad as a wet hen* or *a piece of cake.* Discuss the literal meaning and the understood meaning in our language.
- Select books that have been crafted for this purpose and share them as read alouds such as: M. Terban’s *Mad as a Wet Hen* (1987) or F. Gwynne’s *A Chocolate Moose For Dinner* (1988) or any P. Parish’s *Amelia Bedelia Books* (1963).
- Have students create a visual display, possibly using digital media, sharing other figurative language phrases and then their literal meanings.

**Synonym Switch:**
Have students read a selection and choose any words that may be difficult for them. Students should not share their words with others and should decide on a definition by either utilizing context clues or the dictionary. They should then think of a synonym for their word. For example, if the difficult word is *dagger*, they might choose the word *knife*. Invite students to illustrate their selected word and present it to other students; have the classmates try to identify the word.


Coming Soon...

New ISBE Winter/Spring Series: ELA Common Core Shift Training Sponsored by the Illinois State Board of Education

The ELA Content Area Specialists will be hosting another professional development opportunity with several one day stops around the state. The cost will be minimal and registration information will be found on the ISBE website shortly.

Content will be geared towards the CCSS shifts and updates that PARCC has made regarding assessments. Breakout sessions will be offered along with lunch.

**Dates and Locations are:**
- Mar 21st: Rockford
- Mar 22nd: Moline
- Apr 9th: Gurnee
- May 1st: Peoria
- May 2nd: Urbana
- May 3rd: Chicago/Midway

Registration details can be found at the following link: [http://conferences.illinoisstate.edu/ela/](http://conferences.illinoisstate.edu/ela/)
Focus on Mathematical Practice 6

The sixth Math Practice Standard, **Attend to Precision**, means mathematically proficient students use clear definitions in discussions with others and in their own reasoning. Students state the meaning of symbols they choose, including using the equal sign consistently and appropriately. They carefully specify units of measure, and label axes to clarify the correspondence with quantities in a problem. They calculate accurately and efficiently, express numerical answers with a degree of precision appropriate for the problem context.

This practice standard is much more about precision in language and communication than it is about accurate calculations. Students should be sharing ideas using grade appropriate concise language and descriptions. Tasks may require the student to present solutions to multi-step problems in the form of valid chains of reasoning, using symbols such as **equal signs** appropriately.

Fluency Expectations in 3rd Grade

**3.OA.7** Students fluently multiply and divide within 100. By the end of grade 3, they know all products of two one-digit numbers from memory.

**3.NBT.2** Students fluently add and subtract within 1000 using strategies & algorithms based on place value, properties of operations, and/or relationship between addition & subtraction.

**3.OA.7** and **3.NBT.2** are both fluency standards; these two standards do not represent equal investments of time in grade 3. Grade 2 students were already adding and subtracting within 1000, just not fluently. That makes **3.NBT.2** a relatively small, incremental expectation. By contrast, multiplication and division are new in grade 3; meeting the multiplication and division fluency standard **3.OA.7** with understanding is a major part of student work in grade 3.


PARCC Updates

PARCC (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers) is actively working on producing computer-innovative assessments for 21 states and the District of Columbia. If you have not already had an opportunity to explore their website, check it out at [parcconline.org](http://parcconline.org). The many resources available include the Model Content Frameworks, Item Prototypes, Performance Level Descriptors, Assessment Reference Sheet, Calculator Policy and Technology Guidelines.

No calculators will be allowed for grades 3-5 (exceptions for those needing accommodations are being discussed). The Model Content Frameworks for 3rd grade provide Examples of Key Advances, Fluency Expectations or Examples of Culminating Standards, Examples of Major Within-Grade Dependencies, Examples of Opportunities for Connections among Standards, Clusters or Domains, Examples of Opportunities for In-Depth Focus, Examples of Opportunities for Connecting Mathematical Content and Mathematical Practices, and Content Emphasis by Cluster. This is a great tool to help educators have a better understanding of what will be assessed by PARCC.
Every Moment is Instructional

A wise teacher once said that “every moment with a child should be an instructional moment.” The adage is simple, yet true. In the classroom, a teacher’s behavior is observed, interpreted and even repeated by students. The importance of a positive example is intuitive, and also proven by research. Studies show that, when teachers act negatively toward students, misbehavior, delinquency, disengagement, and academic failure increases (U.S. Department of Education, 1998).

Further research indicates that positive modeling and explicit instruction are the best ways to decrease student misbehavior (Jonassen, 1999), thus increasing learning and (re)-engagement of students. Effective modeling includes exhibiting competencies in social, emotional, behavioral, physical and cognitive learning development while explicit instruction can focus on teaching students healthy coping strategies, behaviors, and academic skills. Teacher-student relationship building also supports an emotionally safe classroom environment. These supportive interactions and modeling directly impact learning.

Some questions teachers may consider when modeling appropriate behaviors:

- Is my tone quiet and calm when I interact with students?
- Do I use appropriate and understandable language?
- Do I model classroom rules?
- What are the strengths of each student in my class?
- Do I react with a respectful tone of voice?
- Does my body language reflect non-confrontation?

As part of the instructional planning process, teachers should consider how students will know when they have acted appropriately or inappropriately. Studies show that acknowledgement by teachers is “related to both initial and long-term academic engagement and social success” (Akin-Little et al, 2004). Methods of acknowledgement/correction need not be elaborate. In fact, social recognition tends to be most effective in reinforcing intrinsic motivation. When using a tangible reward system initially to increase buy-in for some students, teachers should:

- Deliver them quickly after the desired behavior is exhibited;
- Connect them to the behavior, not the individual;
- Vary the type (praise, incentives, approval, recognition, points), number, and frequency;
- Consider the appropriateness of the reward; and
- Gradually reduce to eventually eliminate

Research has shown that younger students positively respond initially to tangible rewards (such as stickers) while older students respond best to social/verbal acknowledgements. Ultimately, planning for effective acknowledgments within the school-wide and classroom systems can increase and maintain positive behaviors.

Helpful Resources

www.edteck.com/dbq - this site is a creative approach to reaching students through images when presenting Content Area Literacy involving teaching with documents

www.isbe.net/learningsupports – Learning Supports site including Conditions for Learning indicators and an A-Z index of resources for helping students

http://www.parcconline.org/ - for the most up to date information on the PARCC Assessments

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheet/ccc?key=0AjIqyKM9dJ7ZYdEhJR3BdMmddBWhnM2YWxWYVm1UWo wTIEEEgdf=0 - Dan Meyer has created a spreadsheet of CCSSM aligned Math tasks for middle and high school teachers. He also shares his Algebra and Geometry curriculum. His blog is full of great classroom ideas and allows teachers a place to interact with other educators.

Visit www.isbe.net to download this newsletter.