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/FY2012WinterCampaignKLTWebinar2On-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

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Academic Vocabulary and the Common Core State Standards

The Common Core Standards for English Language Arts emphasize the teaching of academic vocabulary (Tier Two 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 about which they already know (conceptual understanding)

Consider the following questions when determining which Tier Two 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?


Sixth Grade Vocabulary Strategy

Possible Sentences (Stahl & Kapinus, 1991) is a pre-reading vocabulary strategy that activates students' prior knowledge about content area vocabulary and concepts.

1. Before students read the text, visually display the chosen vocabulary.
2. Ask students to define the words and pair related words together.
3. Ask individual or pairs of students to write sentences using their word pairs. Remind students that their sentences should be ones they expect to see while reading the text.
4. Have students read the text and compare their possible sentences with the actual sentences within the text.
5. If your students' possible sentences are inaccurate, ask them to rewrite their sentences.
6. Invite students to share their sentences with the class.

http://www.adlit.org/strategies/19782/


Coming Soon...

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 is now open.

Content will be geared towards the CCSS shifts in English/Language Arts. Breakout sessions will be offered along with lunch.

Dates and Locations

- 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/
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 carefully define variables for algebraic word problems in order to be successful.

Fluency Expectations for 6th Grade

**6.NS.2** Students fluently divide multi-digit numbers using the standard algorithm. This is the culminating standard for work with division of whole numbers.

**6.NS.3** Students fluently add, subtract, multiply, and divide multi-digit decimals using the standard algorithm for each operation. This is the culminating standard relating to the domains of Number and Operations in Base Ten, Operations & Algebraic Thinking, and Number and Operations-Fractions.

**6.NS.1** Students interpret and compute quotients of fractions & solve word problems involving division of fractions by fractions. This completes the extension of operations to fractions.


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. The many resources available include the Model Content Frameworks, Item Prototypes, Performance Level Descriptors, Assessment Reference Sheet, Calculator Policy and Technology Guidelines. For 6th grade, an online four function calculator with square root will be provided on specific questions. Not all math questions will allow a calculator.

The Model Content Frameworks for 6th 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 better understand what will be assessed.

“Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire.”

William Butler Yeats
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?

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 acknowledgements within the school-wide and classroom systems can increase and maintain positive behaviors.