

Coaching Guidance to Support Initial Stages of Teacher Learning in Formative Assessment

Those supporting teachers to learn formative assessment often wonder how to guide teachers as they move through different stages of learning. This resource outlines early stages of teacher learning, and offers guidance to coaches about how to support teachers as they begin formative assessment implementation.

The Coaching Role: Launching Teacher Learning in Formative Assessment

Coaches play an important role in helping teachers understand the definition and develop a vision for formative assessment that is focused on changes to both the teacher and student roles. This is not always easy and can't be done by coaches alone. Building principals and district leaders also play a critical role in helping teachers understand and activate this vision of student learning.

As teachers are introduced to formative assessment, coaches have two simultaneous roles. In the earliest stage, teachers need to know what formative assessment is, and that may not be easy due to the many misconceptions in the field. Coaches help teachers to understand the definition and principles of formative assessment and must feel comfortable to directly resolve teacher misconceptions during this time. As teachers develop a general understanding of what is possible, coaches play a role in helping teachers to develop a vision of what is possible for themselves, and their students, and, how instructional practices may shift as teachers and students learn the instructional routines that are the hallmark of formative assessment practice.

Stages of Formative Assessment Learning

With over 15 years of leading district and school formative assessment implementation, WestEd's Formative Assessment Team has observed that teacher learning typically occurs in four identifiable stages. These stages do not have a timeline, teachers go through them at different rates, and not every teacher reaches the final stage. Based on WestEd's experience with teachers actively engaged in professional learning, it often takes from 2 to 3 years of intentional learning and in-class support, about 60-70 hours of professional development per year, to consolidate their learning, and to develop the new instructional routines and classroom culture to actively engage students in each step of the formative assessment process.

Effective professional learning, leadership support and in-class observations through peer dialogue or coaching significantly impact teachers' experiences learning formative assessment. Those who support teacher learning will learn to identify and respond to teacher learning in all four of these stages, as teachers benefit from quite different learning structures, prompts and guidance during each stage. Below is a brief summary of each stage, followed by guidance for coaches for those teachers who are getting started, or whose learning is just emerging.

Getting Started: As teachers begin work in formative assessment, they benefit from school and district

leaders supporting a coherent vision and a shared definition of formative assessment. Both teachers and leaders may need to engage in resource review and dialogue to unlearn older conceptions of formative assessment. Coaches will need to provide time for teachers to explore formative assessment as a process that takes place during learning and actively involves students.

Emerging Learning: At this stage, the primary focus is on developing teacher-level skills and new routines to implement formative assessment. Teachers explore ways to elicit and use evidence during lessons, develop daily effective Learning Goals and Success Criteria, and begin to develop the classroom structures that support new approaches to teacher feedback. While the emphasis is on the knowledge and skills through which teachers notice, interpret and respond to evidence, there is significant benefit for teachers to model and explore these practices with students during this initial stage of their own learning.

Maturing Learning: The focus of learning during this stage is on developing students' use of evidence to guide their own, and their peers, learning. This involves creating daily routines and procedures for students to explore and assess evidence to understand how they are learning. Teachers explicitly teach, model and give students feedback on their use of learning strategies, such as independent goal setting, use of evidence during academic discourse, and learning with and from peers.

Consolidating Learning: At this stage, the focus is on assessing impact and using evidence to refine and consolidate learning. Teachers may evaluate impact in several ways, including evidence of improving student learning, the impact on student agency, or the degree to which formative assessment has supported equity goals. Student voice, while important in all stages, is elevated in this stage, as students speak to the value of this work to their own learning.

Supporting Teachers as they are Getting Started in Formative Assessment:

Work with teachers to develop a shared definition of formative assessment as aligned with the research.

- Share videos, readings and teacher reflections and provide opportunities to understand how formative assessment as a process is fundamentally different than formative assessment as a shorter-cycle assessment.
- Be prepared to respond to typical misconceptions about formative assessment.
- Help teachers explore why this work is valuable and how the use of evidence by students provides new ways for students to support their own, and their peers', learning.

Supporting Teacher Learning during Emerging Learning

As formative assessment **learning is emerging** teachers learn the following core teacher-focused practices outlined in the feedback loop.

- Teachers learn to develop and communicate the lesson Learning Goals to students and develop ways for students to explore and come to understand lesson Success Criteria.
- Teachers design lessons in which the learning tasks and activities are aligned with the lesson Learning Goal, and through which evidence of student learning is visible, and is demonstrated in multiple ways, during the lesson.
- Teachers increase their use of feedback, prompts and questions that provide students with greater responsibility to use evidence to explore, make meaning, and grapple with

next steps in learning.

- Teachers learn new ways to plan lessons that show student understanding as it emerges during the lesson, and that includes multiple opportunities for teacher and students to engage with evidence to guide learning.
- Teachers explore ways for students to internalize and use the Learning Goal and Success Criteria during lessons, through such practices as co-constructing Success Criteria and student self-assessment.

The power of formative assessment is rooted in the use of evidence. To use evidence, teachers need to create opportunities through which they can observe and respond to evidence during learning, in order to know where each student in the class is in their progress towards the Learning Goal.

During emerging learning, teachers create new approaches to sequencing learning activities to ensure that students have many ways to share and examine what they know. These may include new routines for activating prior knowledge, questioning and discourse.

As teachers begin to shift instruction, they will explore a range of ways to explore how formative assessment can best support learning in their own classroom, within their own context and disciplinary goals, and with their specific students. As teachers explore these ideas, they may begin to apply key formative assessment practices as outlined in the image below. As teacher learning is emerging, use of these new routines is often tentative, may take place sporadically, and there is a likelihood that teachers will, mistakenly, try to place these new practices “on top of” existing instruction.

Image 1: Teachers learn core formative assessment practices during emerging learning

Teachers Learn and Apply Formative Assessment Practices During Emerging Learning

Teachers:

- Develop lesson-sized Learning Goals
- Help students use examples and models to better understand expected qualities of learning
- Develop and use Success Criteria
- Help students understand how to use Success Criteria during lessons
- Determine, in advance of lessons, what evidence might be observed during the lesson, and what possible responses might most benefit students as they take next steps in learning



Teachers:

- Create new routines to regularly provide individualized feedback to students
- Use evidence during lessons to support students to take next steps in their own learning
- Engage students in self-reflection to help them consider how they can move learning forward
- Support peer review and peer support to take next steps in learning

Teachers:

- Plan lessons that include a variety of ways for students to show evidence of where they are in their learning
- Gather evidence of learning during each learning activity
- Interpret and respond to learning while it is underway
- Teach students to interpret evidence, engage in peer feedback, self-assess and set goals

Frequent opportunities for teacher reflection, particularly using noticing and sensemaking practices, can help teachers identify ways to engage students in using evidence. For example, developing routines for students to co-construct Success Criteria, through the use of exemplars and model work products, helps students better understand the qualities of learning, and how they will demonstrate (i.e., show evidence) that they've met the Learning Goal. Other practices that explicitly teach students how to engage with evidence, such as peer feedback and self-assessment, lay a foundation for future shifts in the teacher and student role.

The Coaching Role: Supporting Emerging Teacher Learning

Bring formative assessment to life

Formative assessment has come to mean many different things, so a first step in this work is to work with teachers to explore, and come to understand, what formative assessment is and what impact it can have on teaching and learning.

Coaches can work with teachers to explore the definition, review text and video about how teachers have come to understand the definition, and observe the qualities of student learning in formative assessment classrooms. Teachers benefit from understanding how formative assessment may shift their own role, as well as how it can enhance the student role in learning.

Involve students early

When students begin to show they are more engaged in learning, teachers take notice. While it may feel messy and confusing to involve students before teachers gain confidence in new routines, teachers who show themselves as learners to their students are demonstrating a key shift in formative assessment – that in our learning culture, we are all learners. This modeling can accelerate student learning during stage 1.

Coaches can encourage and support this shift. For example, while a teacher is learning to use effective feedback, have the teacher post guidelines for effective practice in the classroom, and offer opportunities for students to reflect on which aspects of these new feedback practices are most helpful to their learning.

Encourage daily habits and practice

Formative assessment involves shifts in daily instructional routines and practices. A common error at this point is that teachers try this out episodically, now and again, or when it suits them. The student role doesn't shift until eliciting, interpreting and using evidence becomes embedded in classroom norms, routines and culture.

Coaches can encourage teachers to make a personal commitment to daily practice or develop a daily instructional routine around which they get coaching support. These might include journaling, noticing and sensemaking, using daily lesson-sized Learning Goals, or developing a new daily routine to involve teacher or peer feedback.

Explore disciplinary content knowledge

Discussions about Learning Goals, how students will know when they are successful in the learning, and how to observe emerging learning are great opportunities for coaches to be at the table to deepen pedagogical content knowledge and understanding of content standards.

Coaches can get involved in formative assessment lesson planning, and integrate district tools, such as learning progressions and curriculum documents, that capture ideas about students emergent and maturing learning within the academic disciplines.