

# Students' Role in Formative Assessment

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The key question that drives the class is not “What are you doing?” It is “What are you learning, and how do you know?”

~ **ADE Formative Assessment Working Group**

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## A Picture of Practice

Students and teachers are jointly responsible for learning in classrooms that use formative assessment principles and practices to inform daily instruction. They work to understand and internalize the lesson-learning goals and success criteria and then actively engage in learning activities. Students analyze evidence (what they say, do, make, or write) to advance their own and their peer’s learning through self-assessment, peer feedback, and discourse practices. They build individual and group agency by understanding their own progress and setting next steps. Students appreciate the shared knowledge and feedback they get from their peers, which prompts them to seek out and give support to others. Students willingly demonstrate what they know using multiple modalities, including in real-world settings.

## How Does the Student Role Shift?

Shifting the student role changes teachers’ and students’ beliefs about what is possible for students. As students build their capacity to self-regulate, act with agency, and hold a vision for their own learning, they navigate uncharted territory for both themselves and their teachers. Teachers and students work at the edge of their learning through this process. For students, this relates to working at the edge of their content knowledge and analytic practices. For teachers, this relates to staying abreast of what students know and can do, as well as the mental models they bring to school with them to make sense of new learning. This inquiry process supports students to excel both academically and socially.

## How Does This Shift Support Learning for All Students?

Formative assessment has a powerful capacity to increase learning for every student, including multilingual students, students with disabilities, students of diverse backgrounds, students from

rural and urban settings, and students from low-income areas. This power comes from formative assessment's ability to (1) equip teachers with the skills to appropriately target instruction and (2) empower students to drive their own learning. It also is an inquiry model that can be used to build a bridge between home and school. Classroom lessons that use the dimensions of formative assessment and leverage students' unique strengths support every student to reach the Arizona State Standards within the general education curriculum. This shift in the student role supports a vision for every student to succeed.

## How Does a Classroom Grounded in Formative Assessment Look and Sound?

**You would see** students engaged in intentional discourse with their peers and their teacher to gauge where they are in their learning and determine what they have to do to progress. You would see students and teachers working together to build success criteria. Students would notice, recognize, and respond to each other's learning using these criteria while also seeking out specific feedback in the moment to promote their learning.

**You would hear** an acceptable level of noise and movement. There would be a pleasant hum in the room that parallels students learning together. You would hear students asking questions and making connections. Students would engage in friendly disagreements about their learning, expressing arguments and claims while supporting and defending ideas.

**You would sense** that this is a safe place to take risks and grow, where every student feels respected and sees that their contribution to the learning community is valued. You would sense high energy as well as calm and productive learning. The culture would be collaborative, supportive, and feel like a community. Students would act as confident risk-takers and problem-solvers who are excited about learning. You would feel a culture of intellectual and emotional trust, evident through conversation, observation, and shared learning moments. Students would support each other, value each other's strengths, and leverage the group to achieve their goals.

## Student Success Criteria

- Act as leaders of their own learning by taking ownership of the learning goals and success criteria, understanding their own progress, and taking action to move learning forward.
- Notice, recognize, and respond to each other's learning using the success criteria.
- Give and receive feedback, seeking out specific feedback in the moment to promote their learning.
- Support each other, value each other's strengths, and leverage the group to achieve goals at the next level.
- Engage with each other through collaborative discussion, including participating in friendly disagreements about their learning, expressing arguments and claims, and supporting and defending ideas.

## Discussion Questions

- What instructional routines do you put in place to support students to practice formative assessment?
- What are the “non-negotiable” contexts in which students need to act with individual agency and collective efficacy?
- Are there culturally specific ways students can more effectively be supported to enact formative assessment practices?