

Teachers' Role in Formative Assessment

The teacher is a perspective shifter, an agency builder and advocate, a communicator of vision and practice, a modeler of transparency and the learning journey.

~ **ADE Formative Assessment Working Group**

A Picture of Practice

Teachers use the formative assessment process to implement learning tasks that are designed to engage students at the edge of what they know and can do, align with their interests, and leverage what they bring with them from their homes and their communities. Teachers gather evidence of students' daily learning, then reflect and respond to it in the moment to advance learning. They do this by paying close attention to student dialogue and demonstrations of learning *during the flow of learning*. In this way, teachers meet students where they are to help them progress toward grade-level standards. Teachers also support students to conduct this inquiry process themselves via self-assessment and peer feedback by providing explicit instruction, practice opportunities, and regular feedback.

During lesson planning, teachers attend to current evidence of learning to design meaningful activities, discussion prompts, and quality questions. These engagements further students' learning and make their thinking visible for evidence collection. Teachers develop specific lesson-sized learning goals, identify possible student misconceptions, and conceptualize a "picture" of what success looks like. In sharing this information with students, students also gain clarity about what they are expected to know and be able to do when they meet learning goals. As teachers advance their own formative assessment practice, they begin to co-construct success criteria with students and support them in setting their own personal learning targets, both of which support students' self-regulation.

By engaging in these processes, teachers and students are well-equipped to respond in the moment to further learning. This responsiveness and feedback nudge student learning forward incrementally. Bronwen Cowie states, "A teacher's response frames what counts as valued

learning.”¹ With this in mind, teachers using formative assessment notice and respond to student learning in relation to the intended curriculum (the learning goals) and individual students' sensemaking processes. This dual lens informs teachers' in-the-moment responses, so they are both aspirational and asset-oriented.

Developing a strong collaborative classroom learning culture is key to formative assessment success for teachers and students. Teachers facilitate this culture by prioritizing internal accountability and authenticity. They normalize being an emergent learner by sharing their own learning journey with students. They provide opportunities for students to practice, get feedback, and try again. They explicitly instruct students on how to make sense of and respond to evidence, aiming to *even the playing field* between students who know how to “do school” and those who do not. They focus on switching between leader and learner roles to encourage students to do the same while developing accountability and collective efficacy.

How Does the Teacher Role Shift?

Shifting the teacher role promotes a learning culture founded on teacher responsiveness and student-driven learning. The focus on transparency in learning goals, processes, and criteria for student success builds student agency. It also creates deep, long-term change in student learning as students internalize the learning expectations and develop greater agency over how and what they learn. Teacher openness about their own learning process supports collaboration and creates a connection between the teacher and students. It also models for students what self-evaluation, planning, adjusting, and moving knowledge-acquisition forward (i.e., the learning process) looks like. With these skills and knowledge, students become better equipped to succeed in their immediate endeavors *and* become lifelong learners.

How Does This Shift Support Learning for All Students?

In classrooms that use formative assessment practices to inform teaching and learning decisions, students' capacities and knowledge are honored and used by the teacher to determine instructional next steps. If students also understand the structures (goals, criteria, etc.) defining expectations for their learning, it promotes positive learning outcomes for all students and the exercise of student agency. It also allows students to advocate for their own learning. When students can voice what they need, they move closer to meeting their learning goals.

¹ Cowie, B. & Harrison, C. & Willis, I. (2018). Supporting teacher responsiveness in assessment for learning through disciplined noticing. *The Curriculum Journal*, 29, 1–15.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09585176.2018.1481442>

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

You would see teachers moving around the classroom, gathering evidence of student learning through listening and observing. Teachers would sit with small groups, co-constructing and assessing knowledge with their students through discourse.

You would hear teachers asking powerful questions, addressing misconceptions, and providing feedback throughout the lesson. Teachers would model the language of learning, though teacher talk would not outweigh student talk.

Teacher Success Criteria

- Plan for learning, getting clear on learning goals and success criteria.
- Continually collect evidence through listening and observing to gauge the status of learning.
- Provide accurate and actionable feedback that drives learning forward.
- Share responsibility for learning with students by supporting them to conduct formative assessment processes themselves.
- Work with leaders to set expectations for fair and appropriate support, observation, and formative evaluation practices.

Discussion Questions

- How do you work on developing your own metacognition as a way to reflect on your teaching practice?
- How can you develop your capacity to respond more deeply to and engage with student reasoning?
- How do you center innovation in your work and become a knowledge producer with your students? What tools and supports do you need?
- What systems need to be put in place so you feel supported in engaging in daily formative assessment practices?
- What supports or systems do you need to put in place to get to know students and families in meaningful ways?