

# Listening to and Learning from Students: The Value of Formative Assessment

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# Think together and share

- What is formative assessment?
- Why do it?
- What might formative assessment have to do with equity?

# Thinking more deeply about teaching & learning

1. Select a passage from your table
2. Identify a line or phrase that helps you to think about (i) what formative assessment is; and (ii) why formative assessment might matter.
3. Share your quote/insight AND briefly explain how the idea connects, extends or challenges your understanding of formative assessment?

# Big idea to explore through workshop

How formative assessments can be used strategically to:

- create conditions for student learning,
- inform teaching practice and
- connect students and faculty within a community for learning.

# Listening to and Learning from Students



# Why formative assessment?

## Learning and collaborating with critical consciousness

- **Getting to know students** → Learn and value ideas that are relevant to students lives, interests and thinking. Building on student prior knowledge strengthens opportunity to learn.
- **Inviting analysis of lesson** → What's creating an access point or barrier to learning? What do I need to add & adjust to create an opportunity to learn?
- **Engaging as faculty learners** → Interrogate assumptions about students, learning & teaching by working collaboratively to explore puzzles of practice
- **Staging ground for inviting students as agents in learning** → You belong monitoring understanding & making decisions to refine understanding/skill is part of what scholars do.
- **Providing a context for collaboration** → Work together to make sense of student learning and to decide on next steps in teaching



## Why Formative Assessment: Equity and the Affective Domain

Students (and everyone else too!) perform better when they feel:

- **Valued** -- Students feel that they matter and their contributions are appreciated
- **Confident:** Students can understand their strengths and see their progress
- **Belonging:** Students feel the community they are participating in reflects their values and experiences.

Intentional strategies in these domains can have significant impact in creating more equitable environments and outcomes

# Jigsaw

With your partner make sense of the strategy. How could it be used in 1 or more of the following ways:

- Get to know students
- Invite analysis of lesson
- Invite students to be agents in learning
- Support faculty critical reflection & learning
- Increase students' sense of value, confidence and belonging
- Provide a context for collaboration in refining opportunities to learn

Be prepared to share your understanding and insights with another pair

Get together with another pair to briefly:

- summarize technique and nature of student involvement; and
- share 2-3 ways it can support student learning & faculty learning.

# So what... Now what....

1. How did today's discussion **connect, extend or challenge** with your ideas about formative assessment?
2. How might these practices support the goals/work of your action plan?

# Formative Assessment Technique: Muddiest Point

## Description:

The *Muddiest Point* is just about the simplest technique one can use. It is also remarkable efficient, since it provides a high information return for a very low investment of time and energy. The technique consists of asking students to jot down a quick response to one question: "What was the muddiest point in .....?" The focus of the *Muddiest Point* assessment might be a lecture, a discussion, a homework assignment, a play, or a film.

## Step-by-Step Procedure:

1. Determine what you want feedback on: the entire class session or one self-contained segment? A lecture, a discussion, a presentation?
2. If you are using the technique in class, reserve a few minutes at the end of the class session. Leave enough time to ask the question, to allow students to respond, and to collect their responses by the usual ending time.
3. Let students know beforehand how much time they will have to respond and what use you will make of their responses.
4. Pass out slips of paper or index cards for students to write on.
5. Collect the responses as or before students leave. Stationing yourself at the door and collecting "muddy points" as students file out is one way; leaving a "muddy point" collection box by the exit is another.
6. Respond to the students' feedback during the next class meeting or as soon as possible afterward.

# Formative Assessment Technique: Connect Extend Challenge

This strategy helps students make connections between new ideas and prior knowledge. It also encourages them to take stock of ongoing questions, tensions, and difficulties as they reflect on what they are learning. The natural place to use Connect-Extend-Challenge is after students have learned something new. It doesn't matter how *much* they have learned--it can be a lesson's worth or a unit's worth. It can be used as a reflection during a lesson, or after a longer project, or when completing a unit of study. This strategy works well with the whole class, in small groups or individually to keep a visible record of students' ideas.

Connect	Extend	Challenge
How are these ideas and information <b>CONNECTED</b> to what you already know?	What new ideas did you get that <b>EXTENDED</b> or pushed your thinking in new directions?	What is still <b>CHALLENGING</b> or confusing for you to get your mind around? What questions, wonderings or tensions do you now have?

## Steps:

1. If you are working in a group, ask students to share some of their thoughts and collect a list of ideas in each of the three categories. They can then share the challenges with the whole class. Or have students write their individual responses on post-it notes and add them to a group or class chart.
2. Keep students' visible thinking alive over time by continually adding new ideas to the lists and revisit the ideas and questions on the chart as students' understandings around a topic or concept develop.
3. Notice what ideas are unfolding as they think through a phenomenon or issue. What kinds of thinking is present in student's CEC reflections? What opportunities can you make for digging into student thinking/ideas, or for addressing or extending an area of confusion/challenge?

*Quoted & compiled from: Visual Thinking Routines website, Project Zero*

# Formative Assessment Technique: Dialogue Folders

This strategy engages students in an ongoing discussion with faculty about their work towards a particular learning outcome. For example, in a writing class it's been used to get students to examine and engage with their writing process: what are they going to write? what are they struggling with? and how will they proceed? (metacognition). The strategy can be adapted to focus on ongoing work, for example, towards a project, engaging a process, or developing a skill. It could also be used for getting learning community feedback. Dialogic instruction values student views and voices in shaping the content or methods of instruction, whereas monologic instruction is teacher dominated where students have little influence.

## What does it entail?

1. Faculty identify a key learning outcome or project that students will work towards throughout the quarter. (For example, if students in a writing class are working on a research paper, an outcome might be to gather and integrate research correctly and ethically from credible, quality sources.)
2. Each student is given a folder with a set of blank pages that remains in the classroom. Each student puts his or her name on it. On the inside cover of the folder, students write a set of core questions focused on that learning outcome that they will regularly address. For example, in a writing class they would write a version of the following questions and attempt to answer in specific ways: How is my research & writing going? What are my strengths? What do I still struggle with? What is the next step in my research and writing? What kind of feedback will help you to take your next steps?
3. Examples of good entries are also given early in the quarter to help students frame their questions and answers.
4. Entries for folders could be assigned in the middle of a project as students are working through their brainstorming or writing process, for example. Entries could also be assigned again after the project is complete as a means of reflection.
5. Instructor gives timely feedback to help with student questions and/or areas of weakness the student has identified. Sometimes the feedback is individual. Sometimes the instructor designs a whole class workshop to address themes in students' journals. (For example, if students are still struggling with citation, or finding credible sources, the instructor can design a lesson to address this)

# Formative assessment: SGID

## Overview

The “Small Group Instructional Diagnostic” is a process for getting feedback from students about their experiences of learning and their ideas for how to strengthen their learning *during* the course. The process occurs towards the end of the first third/half of the course.

Faculty could lead the feedback session themselves, but it’s usually facilitated by someone outside of the class (e.g. student affairs professional, peer mentor, other colleague etc) to ensure that students can be completely candid. The facilitator also helps students frame their critiques as opportunities for specific refinements.

The facilitator meets with the faculty member before the session to develop an understanding of what the class learning outcomes are, and what the teacher is noticing or wondering about students experiences. After the session, the facilitator meets again with the faculty member to help make sense of the feedback, identify next steps in practice, and to plan when/how to report out.

## Steps for the group feedback session

1. Introduce SGID & explain that the goal is for the instructor and students to gain insights that could help them make adjustments that could strengthen the learning experience and opportunities.
2. Divide class into small groups (4-5 folks) in order to brainstorm their experiences around the questions listed below. A group member acts as scribe to record all the feedback from the brainstorming session. The group then notes the consensus areas and priorities. (20 mins)
  - What has helped you learn in this class?
  - What suggestions do you have for the instructor that could improve your learning?
  - What ideas do you have for strengthen your own approach to learning in this course?
3. Groups report out (20 mins) -- Structure report out session so it’s focused on one question at a time. Track student responses. Ask clarifying questions as needed to assure that feedback for the instructor is as clear, as constructive, and as specific as possible. (Help group frame critiques as ideas for changes)
4. Wrapup (5-10 minutes) – Share with students that faculty will review and reflect on the information. They will report back to (i) identify themes in feedback; (ii) share what changes they’ll make and why (e.g. significant number of folks requested, serves purpose for learning; etc) ; (iii) acknowledge feedback where they won’t make changes and why (e.g. need to prioritize where they put their efforts if change will be effective, or needs time to set up, etc). Thank class & ask for student reaction to the process.

adapted from <http://www.tacoma.washington.edu/tlt/sgid>

# Why formative assessment?

“Efforts at school reform must give as much attention to the conditions for teacher learning as for student learning.... ...any school that wishes it’s teachers to teach well had better provide the conditions for them to be learning continually...  
...Unless we create the conditions for teacher learning, every single reform that we initiate, even if it looks like it is working at the beginning, will eventually erode and disappear. An effectively reformed school is a setting that is educative for its teachers.”

Conditions for powerful teacher learning mirror conditions for student learning. The learner is

- “an active agent in the process... through experimentation and inquiry, as well as... dialogue and questioning.”
- “engaged in critical reflection that is focused on “the work of the students.”
- works together with others “in ways that scaffold and support each other’s learning, and in ways that supplement each other’s knowledge. Collaboration is a marriage of insufficiencies...[to address] difficult intellectual and professional challenges that are nearly impossible to accomplish alone but are readily addressed in the company of others.”
- “Supported, legitimated and nurtured in a community or culture that values and creates many opportunities for [the processes of activity, reflection, emotion and collaboration] to occur and to be accomplished with success and pleasure.”

*excerpts from Shulman, 2004 p 504-519*

# Why formative assessment?

“In communities where inquiry is a stance (not a project or strategy), groups of (educators) engage in joint construction of local knowledge through conversation and other forms of collaborative analysis and interpretation. Together, they construct problems of practice, within particular local contexts and consider alternative approaches to those problems. They also raise new questions about students, subject matter, learning assessments, equity, and access. This involves framing certain educational issues as dilemmas rather than problems with clear solutions and deliberating thoughtfully about decisions that involve competing claims to justice. Much of this depends on reconsidering assumptions about teaching, learning, and schooling but also challenging common school practices and policies that perpetuate inequities. In all of this work, students’ learning is central -- participants gather and analyze data from class-room and school contexts, valuing students’ cultural and linguistic resources and advocating for students and their families...”

*Cochran-Smith, 2004*

## Why formative assessment?

Learning can and often does take place without the benefit of teaching - and sometimes in spite of it - but there is no such thing as effective teaching in the absence of learning. Teaching without learning is just talking. College instructors who have assumed that their students were learning what they were trying to teach them are regularly faced with disappointing evidence to the contrary when they grade tests and term papers. Too often, students have not learned as much or as well as was expected. There are gaps, sometimes considerable ones, between what was taught and what has been learned. By the time faculty notice these gaps in knowledge or understanding, it is frequently too late to remedy the problems.

*Angelo & Cross 1993, p3.*

## Why formative assessment?

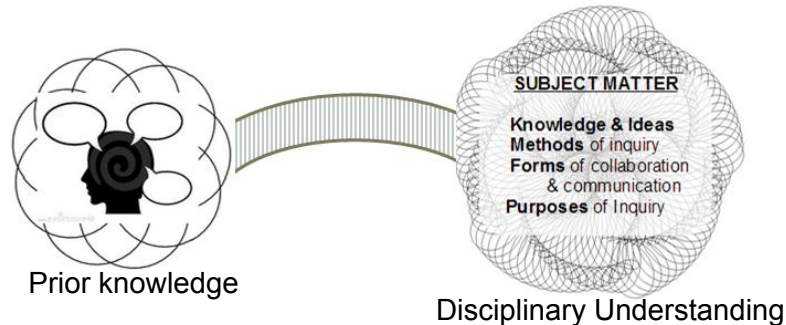
“ ..at its best...sustained inquiry into and reflection on teacher practice combines the mindfulness of artists with the inquiring and open-mindedness of researchers. It provides the time for standing back and reflecting, and reminds people why they became teachers in the first place. It returns them to the core of the profession--a commitment to student learning”

*Weinbaum, et al, 2004, p.19*

# Why formative assessment?

A teacher who engages a Pedagogy of Substance attends to the subject matter, and how that subject matter is "represented in the heads of students" in order to create "representations... that will be a bridge between the subject matter and the students"

*p. 134, Shulman, 2004*



## Why formative assessment?

Information elicited by teachers or other classroom participants from students during formative assessment may contain a wide variety of information that could inform instruction. The most common type of information elicited is about the conceptual understanding of students around a particular learning objective. However, Lyon (2013) showed how formative assessment might also be used to elicit students' culture and language prior knowledge and practices. He found these prior knowledge and practices critical to consider in organizing equitable learning opportunities in science classrooms as they might lead to an expansion of learning goals within the classroom and act as resources for learning.

*Morrison, D., 2015*

## Why formative assessment?

Students who are labeled “unsuccessful” and their teachers....acutely feel this constraint. Many teachers might feel comfortable allowing for student choice and input, group work, and class projects that emphasize students’ construction of knowledge through critical thinking and student presentation of findings...But when a student is not succeeding? Typically, the response is to constrain the curriculum, the expectations, the pedagogy, and thus, the students. And, lest we ignore their experience in the classroom—the teacher is constrained as well. But why constrain? Apparently the logic is this: Struggling students cannot be expected to commandeer a number of different variables at once, and if they are to grasp anything, let it be the basics. But to “do” school in this constrained fashion is to surely squash any attempt at all to allow students to experience “flow”—that is, what Hillocks (1995) describes as having “pleasure, confidence, and absorption of the tasks at hand”

*McCann et al., 2005*

## Why formative assessment?

..formative assessment is more than a checklist of qualities or collection of activities. Rather, it's made up of a sequence of moves that invite a positive, ongoing relationship between teachers and their students...These moves involve asking effective questions, giving students adequate time to think and respond, and asking probing follow-up questions that deepen student understanding.

...formative assessment is more than a march toward the known. It's a process for uncovering deeper understanding, which means having access to evidence about what students are thinking.

... it is about collecting more substantial evidence to make decisions about what to teach, reteach, or even pre-teach for a particular group of students. The more one learns about how real students in a particular classroom approach the material, the better one can guide them through the bottlenecks, cul-de-sacs, and eddies that will inevitably mark a student's progression toward an understanding of conceptually difficult material. A teacher needs to know, through practical training and rich classroom experience, where [students] get stuck and why. How to build this teacher knowledge of different students' learning progressions, in relation to different topics and different levels of background knowledge, is one of the most important formative assessment challenges.

*Duckor, 2014*

# Context for our Conversation

- How do we tap into student perspectives in an ongoing way?
- How do we set up situations where we “read” the class well enough to determine if something is not working or needs to be adjusted?
- How do we use assessment to address the affective domain?
- How do we reflect on that feedback as faculty to cultivate an inquiry-centered collaboration with students *and* our teaching partners?