

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENTS PART TWO AND USING DATA

So far this month in the Teacher's Corner, we have discussed aligning lesson goals with assessments, types of summative assessments, and a few formative assessment ideas. This week we will conclude by exploring three more types of formative assessments and how to use data to have a positive impact on student learning.

STUDENT SELF-ASSESSMENTS

One great way to examine student progress is to train students to assess themselves. There are many advantages to having students reflect on their learning process and their performance in class. Students may know that they are struggling because they are unable to complete exercises or are confused when asked to perform tasks in class. A benefit of self-assessment is that it forces students to acknowledge when they are having trouble and need more practice. After students consider their performance, you can have them share their self-assessments in a variety of ways.

Guiding students to reflect honestly can take some practice. At first, some students are afraid to admit they need help and/or inflate their ratings of how well they understand things. However, asking students to examine how closely their self-assessments align with their performance on tasks like quizzes and tests will help them see the benefits of being honest about their learning process. Another important element of successful self-assessment is creating a classroom culture where students feel comfortable asking for assistance and support each other's learning.

Consistently using one self-assessment method can help make the process more intuitive for students. Helpful strategies are discussed below, and you can find additional ideas in the *English Teaching Forum* article [Using Self-assessment for Evaluation](#).

Response Cards

You can create response cards for each of your students to keep in his/her desk, notebook, or school bag. Some teachers use colors for students to show how well they grasp content. For example, green indicates the student fully understands, yellow means they need more examples or practice, and red means they do not understand at all. Instead of colors, you can use a smiling face, a neutral face, and a frowning face to indicate these same levels of comprehension. After you pose a question or give students a task to

complete, ask them to show the card that corresponds to their level of understanding by holding it up, or displaying it on their table or in their laps. By looking around at the response cards, you get instant data to guide your instruction. You can adjust your teaching by adding more practice, reviewing the concept in the next class period, or moving ahead if your students are ready.

Signals

Hand signals are another great way for students to communicate their self-assessments. A thumb pointed downward can indicate lack of understanding, a thumb parallel to the floor can show a need for more practice, and a thumb pointed upward can demonstrate that a student feels confident about a concept. Similarly, the scale below, starting with a fist and ending with four fingers can show a student’s level of understanding.

Rating:	0	1	2	3	4
How to display:	Student holds up a closed fist.	Student holds up one finger.	Student holds up two fingers.	Student holds up three fingers.	Student holds up four fingers.
What it indicates:	I have no understanding of this concept or skill.	I have heard of this concept or skill.	I have some knowledge of this concept or can use this skill in some situations.	I know a good amount about this concept and/or can apply this skill most of the time.	I can explain or teach this concept or skill to someone else.

PEER ASSESSMENTS

You can collect data by asking students to assess one another. Students often enjoy receiving feedback from someone other than their teacher and may be more open to ideas from a classmate. Peer assessment also trains students to recognize what successful work looks like. Peer assessors can learn about their own performance if they see examples of success or areas for improvement in the work they are evaluating.

You can assign partners to examine each other’s work, or collect assignments and randomly distribute them to the class. Multiple peers can assess the same assignment to offer different perspectives. The most important part of asking students to take on the role of assessor is that they must have established guidelines and criteria for rating or grading their classmate’s work. This could be a checklist or rubric similar to those presented in Week 3 of October’s Teacher’s Corner, or a rating scale. Students must know what they are looking for, what constitutes successful completion of a task, and what indicates a need for improvement.

Peer evaluation can be highly effective when used as a formative assessment because it allows students to get feedback and improve their assignments. Teachers can examine checklists, rubrics, rating scales, or notes between peers to identify areas where students need further instruction or guidance.

UTILIZING DATA

After giving students a formative assessment, you can use the data to determine the effectiveness of your teaching. If all students successfully completed the task, proceed with the next lesson. If no students successfully completed the task, you need to reteach and consider a new way to present the content. Of course, situations where *all* students perform exactly the same way on an assignment are highly unlikely in a real classroom! Formative assessment data can help us identify specific students that need review or additional practice, and help us improve their performance.

Small Group Support

You can use data from formative assessments to form small groups of students who may need additional instructional support. If the assessment measures specific skills or standards, the data will show you exactly what you need to reteach. Record data in a table like the one below and form review groups after you score assessments. Use independent work time or organize a tutoring session to reteach the content and provide more practice to students who need it.

Assignment Topic: <i>Past tense verbs</i>		Date: <i>September 25th</i>		
Question Number	Learning Standard or Skill Addressed	Correct Responses	Incorrect Responses	Students Needing Review
<i>1</i>	<i>regular verbs in past</i>	<i>27</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>Fatima, Maria, Kenji, Fin,</i>

	<i>tense (-ed)</i>			<i>Mattias</i>
2	<i>irregular verbs in past tense</i>	3	30	<i>Whole class review/practice</i>
3				
4				
5				

After you provide additional instruction to students, check their understanding again to be sure they have improved. You can give them the same assessment they took the first time, or develop a new one that measures the same skill. The important thing is that students are able to apply what they have learned and complete the task successfully.

Peer-to-Peer Assistance

Formative assessments can yield unique opportunities for students to support each other in the classroom. For example, use a peer assessment checklist to assess your students' progress on an essay. Some students perform very well on certain parts of the essay, while others do not. When it is time for students to revise the essays, pair or group students with different strengths so they can benefit from each other's feedback.

Accurate self-assessments can also create opportunities for peer support in your classroom. Students who understand a concept can assist those who need more practice. Sometimes learning from a classmate, rather than the teacher, can help students grasp material they have struggled with in the past.

When using peer-to-peer assistance, remember that it should not replace your teaching. Asking the same students to take on a helping role too often can put a strain on classroom relationships. Situations where classmates can support each other simultaneously are the best use of this method.

Challenging Successful Students

Formative assessment data can also help you challenge successful students by creating enrichment opportunities. You can give them assignments that require them to apply what they have learned to new situations. Below are some ideas for activities you might use with high-performing students.

- Have them create their own exercises or a game on the topic
- Let students read a novel independently and conduct a book club (See [Literature Circles as Support for Language Development](#) from *English Teaching Forum* for ideas.)
- Ask them to create a piece of writing using a new skill or structure
- Require them to apply a process to new types of problems or multi-step problems
- Allow students to read books on the topic and complete graphic organizers
- Let them choose a topic to research and plan a presentation, poster, brochure or report
- Give students learning games related to the topic