

THE FORMATIVE CLASSROOM

Real teachers. Real students. Real process.

FACILITATOR GUIDE



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Classroom Demographic Descriptions

West Springfield Public Schools, West Springfield, MA

Emily O'Brien—Fifth Grade—Coburn School (DVD 2)

Mrs. Emily O'Brien's fifth-grade class is a full-inclusion classroom. In Massachusetts, this means that the class is comprised of students at various levels of academic ability, and various levels of English proficiency. Some students have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or are transitioning English Language Learners (ELLs). The students in Mrs. O'Brien's class come from several countries, including Russia, Turkey, Puerto Rico, and Ghana. They speak languages ranging from Turkish (home and formal dialect) and Russian to Puerto Rican Spanish. The religious background of the students ranges from Catholic to Muslim.

Shaun Tharaldson—Ninth Grade—West Springfield High School (DVD 4)

Mr. Shaun Tharaldson's ninth-grade world history honors class is unusual both in size and demographics. The 34 students in the class represent a true sample of the ethnic and cultural diversity of the West Springfield High School student body. The class includes students of Russian, Ukrainian, Turkish, Pakistani, African, and Latin American heritage. Three students have primary languages other than English. Most students are enrolled in world language courses such as French, Italian, or Spanish. The world history honors curriculum is challenging, rigorous, and fast paced. The strength of these students is their ability to work collectively as they move through thousands of years of history and ultimately achieve the high expectations Mr. Tharaldson sets.

Boston Public Schools, Boston, MA

Alice Wong—Third Grade—Patrick Lyndon Pilot School (DVD 1)

Ms. Alice Wong's third-grade class is a general education classroom. This is Ms. Wong's second year with her students as she looped with her students from second to third grade. A few students with Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and a few are transitioning English Language Learners (ELLs). Spanish is the home language of all the ELL students. The majority of the students were born in the United States and English is their native language. However, a variety of ethnic backgrounds are represented in Ms. Wong's class, such as Puerto Rican, Lebanese, Greek, Irish, and Ecuadorian.

Amber Malm—Sixth Grade—Patrick Lyndon Pilot School (DVD 3)

Ms. Amber Malm's sixth-grade English language arts class is a "co-teach" program. Ms. Malm's class is comprised of general education students as well as students with Individual Education Plans (IEPs). The students with IEPs work daily with Ms. Szczepanski through the co-teach framework. Although Ms. Szczepanski's primary role is to work with students assigned to her for services, both Ms. Szczepanski and Ms. Malm have developed an effective flexible grouping model that meets the needs of all students at various times. Most of the students were born in the United States and are native English speakers. Ethnic backgrounds represented in the class include Puerto Rican, Dominican, Haitian, and Irish. The home language of some students is Spanish.

Introduction

The Formative Classroom

Measured Progress is proud to present *The Formative Classroom*, a DVD series that highlights the successful use of formative assessment practices in two Massachusetts locales. Teachers and administrators in the West Springfield Public School District in the western part of the state and their counterparts in Boston’s Patrick Lyndon Pilot School defined a vision of effective classroom, formative assessment practices and brought that vision to life with their students.

In tandem with other school and district initiatives, each location formed teams, or cadres, of teachers to learn together as they implemented their new practices. District- and site-level administrators stayed the course and maintained the vision of high-quality classroom assessment by providing the essential support to maintain the initiative’s momentum over a multiyear time span. The results of the school- and district-wide efforts are depicted in this series through the experiences and observations of a selection of teachers across grade levels, content areas, and classroom configurations.

Formative assessment as a term is widely recognized in the educational community. However, there are points regarding what research says about formative assessment that we first need to consider. Namely, formative assessment is a *process*—not a product. Formative assessment is not something that can be purchased and used to test students. Many tools (e.g., graphic organizers, activities, and ancillary

materials associated with programs or texts) can be used formatively, but they are not formative until the information gathered from them is used to adjust instruction and provide feedback to students about their learning. Secondly, formative assessment is instructional practice that involves both teachers and students and requires students to be active partners throughout the instruction/learning process.

Although the term formative assessment is well known, research indicates that the actual practice is not widespread. One clear reason is because many teachers do not understand that formative assessment is pedagogy, as opposed to a specific testing event. There is, however, ample evidence indicating that formative assessment, when done with intent and a clear purpose, has a dramatic, positive impact on student learning. Research also indicates that students become engaged in their learning and take responsibility for this learning when formative assessment practices are adopted and become part of classroom culture. (Black & Wiliam, 2008)

Although many of the instructional practices generally associated with formative assessment—observation, questioning, having students work together, and establishing learning goals—are not new to teachers, the level and kind of implementation is what separates effective practice from “just doing it.” We should and *need* to ask, “How do we collect information about student learning? How do we,

as teachers, use this information to adjust our instruction to more closely address the specific learning needs of our students?” Responding to these questions helps to clarify the level of implementation and effectiveness of formative assessment.

There are key components that comprise the formative assessment process. Used in a coordinated intentional fashion, these components become the building blocks for *The Formative Classroom*:

1. Establishing Goals for Learning
2. Instructional Activities for Gathering Evidence
3. Feedback
4. Student Role in Formative Assessment
5. Purposeful Planning

While each of these components is important, their interrelationship is what makes formative assessment such a powerful process for improving student learning. To provide direction and guidance to the teacher and to students, the initial focus of the practice of formative assessment must be on **Establishing Goals for Learning** and sharing criteria for success. This sharing is the foundation for all formative classroom assessment.

Based on the **Established Goals for Learning**, or learning targets, teachers are then better able to **Purposefully Plan** and implement the lessons, activities, tasks, observations, questions,