Formative Assessment

"Formative assessment is defined as assessment carried out during the instructional process for the purpose of improving teaching or learning … What makes formative assessment formative is that it is immediately used to make adjustments so as to form new learning".

- L. A. Shepard

Formative Assessments (assessment *for* learning) refer to the **ongoing process** that students and teachers engage in when they:

- focus on the learning goals (know where they are going)
- take stock of where current work is in relation to that goal (know where they are now)
- take action to move closer to the goal (know how to close the gap)

Formative assessments are used to gather evidence, both formally and informally, for the purpose of improving learning.

It is not the **instrument** that is formative; it is the use of the information gathered, by whatever means, to adjust teaching and learning, that makes it formative.

Reasons for Formative Assessments:

- They promote increases in achievement to help students meet more outcomes
- They support ongoing student growth
- They offer descriptive feedback to the students
- They involve the students in the assessment process (self- and peer-assessment)
- They help teachers diagnose and respond to student needs by answering critical questions:
  - Who does and does not understand the lesson?
  - What are this student's strengths and needs?
  - What misconceptions do I need to address?
  - What feedback should I give to students?
  - What adjustments should I make to instruction?
  - How should I group students?
  - What differentiation do I need to prepare?

When the cook tastes the soup, it is formative.
When the guests taste the soup, it is summative. – Ian Krips, SPDU

Seven Strategies for Formative Assessment

These strategies offer effective research-based practices that will help students develop the skills and patterns of thought they need to improve their own achievement.

Strategy 1: Provide student with a clear and understandable vision of the learning target.

Motivation and achievement both increase when instruction is guided by clearly defined targets. Activities that help students answer the question, "What's the learning?" set the stage for all further formative assessment actions

Strategy 2: Use examples and models of strong and weak work.

Carefully chosen examples of the range of quality can create and refine students' understanding of the learning goal by helping students answer the questions, "What defines quality work?" and "What are some problems to avoid?"

Strategy 3: Offer regular descriptive feedback.

Effective feedback shows students where they are on their path to attaining the intended learning. Its answers for students the questions, "What are my strengths?"; "What do I need to work on?" and "Where did I go wrong and what can I do about it?"

Strategy 4: Teach students to self-assess and set goals.

The information provided in effective feedback models the kind of evaluation thinking we want students to be able to do themselves. Strategy 4 teaches students to identify their strengths and weaknesses and to set goals for further learning. It helps them answer the questions, "What am I good at?"; "What do I need to work on?"; and "What should I do next?"

Strategy 5: Design lessons to focus on one learning target or aspect of quality at a time.

When assessment information indentifies a need, we can adjust instruction to target that need. In this strategy, we scaffold learning by narrowing the focus of a lesson to help students master a specific learning goal or to address specific misconceptions or problems.

Strategy 6: Teach the students focused revision.

This is a companion to Strategy 5 – when a concept, skill, or competence proves difficult for students, we can let them practice it in smaller segments, and five them feedback on just the aspects they are practicing. This strategy allows students to revise their initial work with a focus on a manageable number of learning targets or aspects of quality.

Strategy 7: Engage students in self-reflection, and let them keep track of and share their learning.

Long-term retention and motivation increase when students track, reflect on, and communicate about their learning. In this strategy, students look back on their journey, reflecting on their learning and sharing their achievements with others.

from Seven Strategies for Assessment for Learning – Jan Chappuis