

Formative Assessment: *Growing Success* - Pre-Session Video Transcript

Introduction

Envision learning environments where students and their teachers are engaged to interact in profound and meaningful ways--ways that demonstrate an evolution of the teaching-learning relationship to one where "...[students] and [teachers are learning] together in a collaborative relationship, each playing an active role in setting learning goals, developing success criteria, giving and receiving feedback, monitoring progress, and adjusting learning strategies" (*Growing Success*, p30).

Welcome to this pre-session video on *Formative Assessment*.

In this video, *formative assessment* is defined, its characteristics explained, and suggestions are made for how you and your students can experience success by framing teaching and learning through its principles.

Take it from me: Having explored these principles, alongside many educators, has been transformational for my own teaching and student learning, as well as that of my colleagues.

As you continue with the video, consider framing your thinking against our session goals:

- (*Teacher Focus*) To deepen your understanding of practices that engage students with differences in backgrounds, learning strengths, needs and interests.
- (*Leadership Focus*) To inform your next best moves to supporting the growth of individual and collective teacher learning and practice.

Formative Assessment - An Introduction

According to Ontario's Assessment & Evaluation framework, *Growing Success*, the "...primary purpose of assessment...is to improve student learning" (p6). The improvement of student learning, from a formative perspective, involves two practices: assessment FOR learning and assessment AS learning.

Let's consider these practices in the context of an example. Throughout the example, consider visualizing formative assessment through the graphic provided in Figure 1: *The Assessment Loop* (Causarano & Coulombe, @HarnessingA, 2018). The graphic can be found under "Learning Activity - Option 1" on the [session website](#).

As we plan learning experiences for our students, we take into account learning goals and success criteria. *Learning goals*, or targets, are set according to one or more of the following: curriculum objectives, global competencies, learning processes, and/or the big ideas of the subject matter students are learning. These goals represent the *What* of learning.

The *How* of learning is defined by *success criteria*. These criteria describe the actions that students are taking to successfully attain learning goals. Prior to engaging students in the learning experience designed, it's critical that we anticipate success criteria.



Identifying potential success criteria mentally prepares us for recognizing them, as students work on problems and tasks. In the context of questioning, inquiry or project-based learning, it's also important that we remain 'open' to variable paths towards a solution or completion of a task. Altogether, being able to recognize these criteria, as well as being open to student thinking, supports educators in helping students consolidate their thinking towards conceptual understanding and procedural fluency.

You might be wondering, how do I 'open' myself to identifying and recognizing how students will be going and are going towards these goals?

This is a great, if not perfect, question to be asking ourselves. **But still...why?**

Well, to be open means that we're in a position, ourselves, to do some learning. That learning might be related to content, pedagogy or a combination of the two. From a content perspective, we might be at a place where we're figuring out how students will interact with a problem or task. Pedagogically, we might also be considering those aspects that will respectfully and equitably address where students are in their own learning. And there are plenty of aspects that come into play. Take for example the following: prior knowledge, background, strengths, needs, interests, and the learning environment.

Whatever combination of factors you're considering, they all have one thing in common--that is, what defines the problem or task that's being assigned to students.

Formative Assessment-Moving Beyond the Task

Let's take a look at moving beyond the task. Earlier, I mentioned that success criteria represent the actions that students are taking towards attaining goals. That means we're now in a space where students are 'working on it'--either independently or collaboratively thinking about the assigned problem or task.

Formatively, we, as educators, now go on 'high alert'...monitoring the 'how', listening to interpret, and looking for learning progressions that can be used to facilitate conversations around criteria important for attaining the goal(s). Over the time that students are engaged with the problem or task, we're naming and noticing key moves that students are making and providing timely, descriptive feedback to all students.

As you discuss students' thinking with them and the group, you'll be well-positioned to co-create success criteria, and over time, with each opportunity to revisit concepts, students can reflect for themselves and/or with their peers about refinements that can be made to the existing criteria.

Providing opportunities and encouraging students to engage in this type of reflection--be it self- or peer-assessment--is referred to as *assessment AS learning*. The beauty of this form of assessment is that it imparts leadership to your students: it helps them to recognize agency in their own learning, and it helps them to build autonomy--i.e., independence to influencing their own learning, as well as taking it upon themselves to learning on behalf of and supporting others.



Each time that we, alongside our students, reflect and discuss the ‘how’ of ‘what’ is being learned models metacognition--the act of thinking about one’s thinking. In essence, as students develop their metacognitive skills, they are becoming better monitors of their own learning--setting goals and making plans for how they can achieve them.

It’s Not That *Straight-Forward*

As we come to know our students better, we recognize the following:

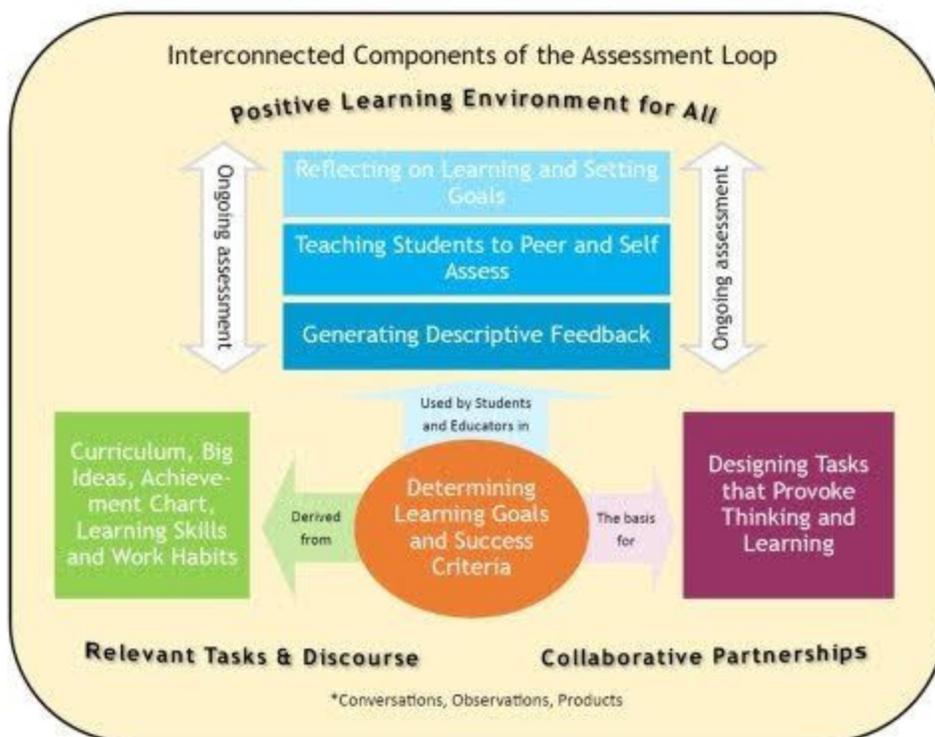
- Each individual develops proficiency in their own time;
- Learning progressions aren’t linear; and
- Students will become more adept at monitoring and personalizing goals.

As a result, learning doesn’t look so straight-forward after all. In fact, each aspect of *The Assessment Loop* (Causarano & Coulombe, 2018), in Figure 1, is connected and dependent upon the others.

Truly, this loop--or framework--represents the complex nature of the thinking and decision-making that occurs for both teachers and their students. It is a ‘space’ that we find ourselves in each and every day. As educators, the more we come to know our students, the curriculum, and what learning and student learning looks like, the better we can communicate where students are in their learning and next steps. By this point--having waded into the complexity of thinking and decision-making with students--we’re providing them with a communication of or an assessment OF their learning.

“Learning doesn’t look so straight-forward after all.”

Figure 1-*The Assessment Loop*



Conclusion

In closing, I'd like to thank you for watching this video and moving further into the "Before You Arrive" activities. And remember, "...student assessment IS the beginning point for instruction, not simply the end" (Volante et al., 2018).

Leading up to our session, here are a few post-video suggestions to continue your learning:

- 1: **Delve into the suggested resources** linked alongside this video--you can find them either below the video on YouTube or, here, on the [session website](#).
- 2: Continuously **connect to the learning goals** mentioned in the introduction.
- 3: As a starting point, **reflect on your formative assessment practices** with your students and colleagues.
- 4: **Visit** and participate in a **colleague's classroom** to experience their use of formative assessment with students.
- 5: **Share your learning** with someone else--e.g., a colleague, your administrator, a network, or your PLC.
- 6: As you stretch your thinking and learning, you might also consider **making connections from Flipped Classrooms to the elements of Thinking Classrooms or to Global Competencies**.

Note that each of these "Learning Activities" can be found on the session website:

- Thinking Classrooms: "[Learning Activity - Option 2](#)"
- Flipped Learning: "[Learning Activity - Option 3](#)"
- Global Competencies: "[Learning Activity - Option 4](#)"

Final Remarks

Lastly, I'm looking forward to working alongside each of you, as we seek to co-create conditions that can give life to equity in the teaching and learning we do with students and one another each and every day.

If at any time, you have questions or comments, please feel free to reach out to me at *Flipping the Focus* using the "Contact" button (email: flippingthefocus@gmail.com) provided on the session website.

Sincerely,

Chris Stewart
Educational Program Lead, *Flipping the Focus*



References

Causarano, J., & Coulombe, H. (2018, September 14). *The Assessment Loop: Merging Assessment and Instruction*. Retrieved January 29, 2019, from <https://harnessassessment.com/2018/09/04/the-assessment-loop-merging-assessment-and-instruction/>

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Volante, L., et al. (2019, January 24). *Culturally responsive teaching in a globalized world*. Retrieved from <https://theconversation.com/culturally-responsive-teaching-in-a-globalized-world-109881>

