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## Spotlight On... Formative Assessment

As an educator, one of your strongest motivators is recognition that students have learned something you have taught them. While there are a number of ways to assess student learning, Dylan Wiliam and Siobhan Leahy (2015) suggest that it is examination of the relationship between “What did I do as a teacher?” and “What did my students learn?” that provides the most powerful opportunity for reflective teaching. Wiliam and Leahy suggest that this ongoing examination, also known as formative assessment, can have a positive impact on students’ growth over time. While a number of educational researchers have defined formative assessment, the most comprehensive is Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam’s definition of formative assessment as being:

“the extent to which evidence about student achievement is elicited, interpreted and used by teachers, learners or their peers, to make decisions about the next steps in instruction that are likely to be better, or better founded, than the decisions they would have taken in the absence of the evidence that was elicited (2009, p. 9).

Black and Wiliam point out that the agents of formative assessment can be not only teachers, but also learners and peers, and that the emphasis of formative assessment is on “decision-driven data collection” that helps the agent know if the instruction has actually resulted in its intended purpose (2009). Additionally, Wiliam’s research regarding formative assessment has demonstrated that while there are benefits to “long-cycle” (month-to month) and “medium cycle” (week to week) formative assessment, the biggest impact occurs with “short-cycle” (daily) formative assessment which can happen every few minutes or even seconds (Wiliam, 2011b).

During the 2015-16 school year, *Literacy Links* will focus on key formative assessment strategies with examples specific to literacy instruction. Five key strategies of formative assessment (listed below) will be explored, one strategy in each upcoming edition.

Students don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.

~Anonymous



Teaching kids to count is fine, but teaching them what counts is best.

~Bob Talbert

## Key Strategies of Formative Assessment (Leahy, et al., 2005)

Agent	Where the learner is going	Where the learner is now	How to get there
Teacher	Clarifying, sharing and understanding learning intentions and success criteria	Engineering effective discussions, tasks and activities that elicit evidence of learning	Providing feedback that moves learning forward
Peer		Activating students as learning resources for one another	
Learner		Activating students as owners of their own learning	

We will dive into each of these strategies in more depth in the coming editions, but in the meantime, we encourage you to explore more resources for building understanding of formative assessment by checking out the **Online Resources** and **Professional Texts** sections below.

### Online Resources

#### [Formative Assessment Overview](#)

In this video clip, formative assessment expert Margaret Heritage provides a succinct explanation of formative assessment and how it can benefit teaching and learning.

#### [Formative Assessment: Examples of Practice](#)

This paper provides vignettes of classroom practice that can be examined for evidence of formative assessment attributes. The vignettes provide rich context for collaborative conversation to better understand formative assessment attributes.

### Professional Texts

A number of professional texts are available to build knowledge of formative assessment including:

#### [Embedding Formative Assessment: Practical Techniques for K-12 Classrooms](#)

Dylan Wiliam and Siobhan Leahy (2015)

No known practice is more effective than classroom formative



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assessment for producing a significant positive impact on student achievement (Learning Sciences International, 2015). In Embedding Formative Assessment, Wiliam and Leahy provide a clear and practical guide for teachers that details five key strategies for formative assessment that benefit teaching and learning. A number of practical techniques are offered for each formative assessment strategy, including tips, cautions and enhancements.

### **The Formative Assessment Action Plan: Practical Steps to More Successful Teaching and Learning**

Doug Fisher and Nancy Frey (2011)

“In this award winning text, Nancy Frey and Douglas Fisher outline a clear-cut, realistic, and rewarding approach to formative assessment. They explain how four discrete steps work in tandem to create a seamless, comprehensive formative assessment system one that has no beginning and no end. This ongoing approach enhances an active give-and-take relationship between teachers and students to promote learning” (Amazon Review).

## **Literature for Children and Adolescents**

### **The Name Jar**

Yangsook Choi (2003)

“Being the new kid in school is hard enough, but what about when nobody can pronounce your name? Having just moved from Korea, Unhei is anxious that American kids will like her. So instead of introducing herself on the first day of school, she tells the class that she will choose a name by the following week. Her new classmates are fascinated by this no-name girl and decide to help out by filling a glass jar with names for her to pick from. But while Unhei practices being a Suzy, Laura, or Amanda, one of her classmates comes to her neighborhood and discovers her real name and its special meaning. On the day of her name choosing, the name jar has mysteriously disappeared. Encouraged by her new friends, Unhei chooses her own Korean name and helps everyone pronounce it—*Yoon-Hey*” (Amazon Review).

### **Go Set A Watchman**

Harper Lee (2015)

*To Kill a Mockingbird* is a standard text in many American classrooms. *Go Set a Watchman* tells the story of Jean Louise Finch two decades after the iconic tale of her childhood. Written before *Mockingbird*, *Watchman* details the impact of the Civil Rights Movement in Maycomb and on the Finch family. Read with caution – this story may break your heart. (M.W. Dunton)



If a child can't learn the way we teach, maybe we should teach the way they learn.

-Ignacio 'Nacho' Estrada

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