



...refers to all those activities undertaken by teachers, and by the students in assessing themselves, which provide information to be used as feedback to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged. Such assessments become formative when the evidence is actually used to adapt the teaching to meet the needs.

Black and Wiliam, 1998 http://www.tki.org.nz/r/assessment/one/formative_e.php

In both definitions students are actively involved in the process beyond taking quizzes and standardized tests. They are reflecting on their work. Another common component is that the teacher adapts his/her *daily* instructional plan using information gained through the assessments to further the learning of students.

It's often interesting and instructive to inquire into the practices of other states and countries as we build our own understanding of a concept. Here is what the Ministry of Education in New Zealand has to say about formative assessment:

“Key elements of formative assessment include:

- * The identification by teachers and learners of learning goals, intentions or outcomes and criteria for achieving these.
 - * Rich conversations between teachers and students that continually build and go deeper.
 - * The provision of effective, timely feedback to enable students to advance their learning.
 - * The active involvement of students in their own learning.
 - * Teachers responding to identified learning needs and strengths by modifying their teaching approach(es).”
- (http://www.tki.org.nz/r/assessment/one/formative_e.php)

In a presentation entitled “Assessment for Learning: Why Bother?” to the SSAT Academies Conference in 2009, Dylan Wiliam discussed research findings of the role of formative assessment and learning. He did a similar presentation here in Maine for the Maine DOE several years ago. SSAT stands for Specialist Schools and Academies Trust, part of The Schools Network (<http://www.specialistschools.org.uk/>).

1. When teachers are trained in “minute by minute and day by day assessment for learning,” the increase in the *speed of student learning* is 80%. Compare this result to what happens when teacher content knowledge is increased from poor to strong. The increase in the speed of student learning is only 10%.

2. He included a chart that demonstrates the different aspects of formative assessment. A facsimile is reproduced below:

	Role	Actions
Teacher	Clarify & share learning goals	Engineering effective discussions, tasks and activities that elicit evidence of learning Providing feedback that moves learners forward
Classmates	Understand & share learning goals	Activating students as learning resources for one another (students learning in collaborative groups)
Student	Understand learning goals	Activating students as owners of their own learning

Looking at this chart it is evident that both the teacher and the students must be very clear about the learning goals and what it looks like to achieve them. Secondly, there must be evidence of learning that the teacher and students can readily identify. A third component is that the instructional plan should incorporate collaborative learning opportunities so that classmates can support one another in their quest to reach the learning goals or meet the standards as we say here in Maine. Wiliam add one last critical aspect of formative assessment as state in # 3 below.

3. “Use evidence about learning to adapt teaching and learning to meet student needs”

This presentation and Wiliam’s other work can be viewed at his website, <http://www.dylanwiliam.net/>. He publishes



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Returning to the Wordle Word Cloud at the beginning of this piece, it becomes evident why words like student, learning, evidence, in-process, activities, and formative stand out. An effective formative assessment plan is an on-going process *embedded in classroom activities* that helps the teacher and learner identify critical evidence of learning as the student strives to meet a well articulated goal. Both the student and teacher use this evidence to shape their next steps. The teacher knows what to alter or emphasize in the next day's lesson and the student knows specifically how to improve his/her work before the final evaluation.

One last quote from Dylan Wiliam...

...any activity where the information is used to adjust the instruction is formative, but the evidence suggests that not all kinds of feedback loops are equally effective. Particularly, it shows that the shortest feedback loops are the most effective. So when teachers ask me how often they should do formative assessments I say to them, not more often than once every five seconds. That is a very tight, tight cycle. Then checking children's work every two or three weeks making adjustments, that is too slow and is too late. (newsletter@annedavies.com)

Awesome websites on formative assessment/assessment for learning:

- Assessment Reform Group: <http://tiny.cc/assessment981>
- Learning How to Learn: <http://tiny.cc/Assessment417>
- New Zealand: <http://tiny.cc/Assessment491>
- Dylan Wiliam: <http://www.dylanwiliam.net/>
- Anne Davies: <http://annedavies.com/>

Works Cited

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- New Zealand Assessment. http://www.tki.org.nz/r/assessment/one/formative_e.php (Accessed August 10, 2009).
- Position Paper on Assessment for Learning (Draft): Third International Conference on Assessment for Learning. Dunedin, New Zealand: March 2009. http://www.annedavies.com/assessment_for_learning_ar_a010.html Accessed August 10, 2009).
- Wiliam, D. Zealand has to say about formative assessment.

Eye on research is written by Jill Spencer

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