

Formative assessment is about purposeful teaching

From the nation’s capital to the classroom, the term “formative assessment” is being waved around importantly, but all it means is a series of techniques teachers use to tell if students are “getting it.” Do they understand the concepts and skills you’re teaching?

Formative assessment can’t be separated from instruction. It is, in fact, instruction. A critical aspect entails identifying in advance what you want students to “get” and what questions you will ask to bring their learning along. And, if you don’t see progress, this method will give you an idea whether you should reframe your lesson.

In other words, your instruction must be purposeful.

Take a look at the video at <http://bit.ly/13ZBm5L> from America Achieves. It shows a high school class learning about symbolism through Shirley Jackson’s short story “The Lottery.”

As you watch, you’ll notice a variety of techniques used to help students understand symbolism. It is clear that this teacher is purposeful; she did not choose her comments randomly. She knows what students need to learn, and through her questioning, she creates a pathway to help



them get there. Having this deep understanding of both content and pedagogy enables her to anticipate how her students will respond to the lesson.

Here are some techniques to integrate formative assessment into your classroom:

Quick Write: Have students write for two to three minutes about what they heard, read, or otherwise learned during the lesson you just taught.

3-2-1: Students jot down three ideas or concepts, two examples or uses of the idea, and one unresolved question.

Muddiest Point: Students disclose the “muddiest,” or least clear, point in the lesson.

Quick Check: Give students index cards, whiteboards, or large sheets of paper. When you ask a question, have *all* students write down their answers. At your signal, have them hold up their answers so you can see who and how many correctly answered the question.

Idea Wave: Each student lists three to five ideas about the assigned topic. A volunteer begins the “idea wave” by sharing an idea. The student to the right of the volunteer then shares an idea; then the next student shares one. You direct the wave until several ideas have been shared.

Tickets: Ask students a specific question about the lesson. They respond on a “ticket” and give it to you, either on their way out of the classroom or on their way in the next day. You then can quickly evaluate how well they got it and plan what additional supports they might need to fully understand the lesson.

—FROM THE AFT’S EDUCATIONAL ISSUES DEPARTMENT

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RESOURCES

THE WHOLE CHILD

When students return to school after the summer break, it can be a challenge to get them back to a classroom routine. To help, WonderGrove Kids has developed 12 “Back to School” instructional animations, which are available to AFT members for free. Developed for preK-2, the instructional animations come with Common Core extension lesson plans to support educators in the first two months of school. WonderGrove Kids features 100 instructional animations and 2,000 extension lessons for 30-plus weeks of school. Animated characters deliver six critical areas of early learning: citizenship, life skills, health, safety, nutrition, and fitness. Along with the videos, which are available in English and Spanish, the site at www.wondergrovekids.com/AFT hosts a blog and forum and is supported by assistive captions and sign language.

TEACH 2013: THE DIRECTOR’S CUT

It’s no secret that the AFT’s TEACH Conference is one of the premier gatherings for instructional practice and policy ideas. Less well known, however, is that many of the papers and presentations are available online. Visit www.aft.org/teach2013/sessions.cfm for resources from conference mini-plenaries and workshops: everything from supporting middle school students on the autism spectrum to the instructional demands of the Common Core State Standards. It’s all free to download, and it’s a great way to catch

up if you missed the summer conference or want to delve deeper into TEACH offerings.

“STEAL THESE TOOLS”

Resources that promote common understanding of the new standards are offered at www.achievethecore.org, a website created by Student Achievement Partners, a nonprofit group founded by three of the contributing authors of the Common Core State Standards. Last summer, the group’s presentation at the AFT’s summer professional development academy won rave reviews for many of its materials, including its Instructional Practice Guides for daily and yearly practice and its Publishers’ Criteria for selecting materials aligned with the standards.

BUT WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

It’s a valid question when it comes to the Common Core State Standards and how they will reshape classroom practice—a question that the AFT and Teaching Channel aim to shed light on for mathematics teachers. The union and the network have partnered to create a series of videos that illustrate how instruction based on two Common Core standards in math (reasoning abstractly and quantitatively; and constructing viable arguments and critiquing the reasoning of others) progresses through grade levels. The six videos are available at <http://bit.ly/17Q6nqk>.