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**About This Author**

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# Formative Teaching and Learning



By [April Pforts](#) | March 5, 2015 9:30 am

Everyone in education has heard of formative assessment. At first, we may think of it as something we collect and reflect on after school, such as an exit ticket or other quick assessment. But what if we shift thinking of it as an after class event to a during class event? We can use formative assessment at any time during a lesson in order to inform instructional decisions. Then it becomes an experience for both teacher and student that happens throughout the class, not just a one time shot when the student is gone from my presence. It becomes an experience I like to call formative teaching and learning.

In my mind, formative teaching and learning is similar to if I were taking my students on a trip. I need to pick the destination – where do I want to take them in their learning? Then, I need to select the route, deciding what scheduled stops there will be and anticipating detours. So, if formative teaching is more like a journey than a one-time event, how do you plan it?

**Clarify**

I select the standards the lesson will address, but I also need to make sure the students know where we're going. I define clear and concise learning goals that relate to the standards, and explicitly share them with the students and connect them to their prior knowledge. I use a launch activity and have the students brainstorm a real-world connection to peak their interest and relevance. For example, in [this lesson on congruence](#), I began class by asking the students to think about congruent shapes around them.

**Explore**

Give students time to grapple with the concepts. During this time, I walk around the room, watching and listening to what the students are doing and saying, and providing support when needed.

- Elicit Evidence — This can be done verbally and nonverbally. I may be asking them a clarifying question about something I heard. Or, I may be listening to see if it seems like they understand.
- Interpret Evidence — This is where I reflect on what I just heard or saw. What does that mean about their understanding?
- Act on the Evidence — This is where I try to scaffold where the student understanding is at, to where I am trying to take them. I may provide reinforcement of an idea, prompt some prior knowledge, or ask a series of leading questions to get them back on track.

**Summarize**

This is such an important part of the lesson, so I safeguard the time so we don't run out of it. The summary brings it all together, making sure we all made the connections at the end, even if they were not made during the exploring activities. I have students share out their ideas, connections, and discoveries. I also review the learning goals with the students, and ask if they feel that we've accomplished them.

My students love formative teaching and learning, because they get to be interactive and figure out how the math makes sense to them. The students develop their own thoughts about the mathematics and are an active part of their learning environment.

As the teacher, I love it because I get to listen to what my students think, and this helps me diagnose and correct misconceptions. I think my students have a deeper understanding because I'm able to give them the targeted feedback they need to continue on their journey.

After the lesson, what do I do with all the new knowledge I gained from this journey with students? Well, I use it to plan the next journey, and start the process again. Hopefully, it's a journey that better meets their needs and allows for deeper understanding.

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