

Attributes Activity

This activity is a good way to introduce formative assessment to your faculty and show how the attributes support the definition. It is based on information found in *Attributes of Effective Formative Assessment*. Council of Chief State School Officers: Washington, DC 2008. A work product coordinated by Dr. Sarah McManus, North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, for the *Formative Assessment for Students and Teachers (FAST) Collaborative*. Have faculty read this paper prior to the activity.

*Introduction (Facilitator, 10 minutes)

Review the definition and attributes with faculty.

*Activity 1 (15 minutes)

Provide each group with a set of paper strips (see pages 4 and 5) with statements describing each attribute or technology supports.

Small groups work on matching all statements to their key attribute.

Small groups consider Guiding Question 1 in order to report out to whole group:

Guiding Question 1: Why do you think the statements you have matched with the attribute relate to that specific attribute? Are there any statements that you think do not match or are hard to match to any of the attributes? Why do you think this?

Share out by group. Randomly select a group to report on each attribute.

Activity 2:* Attributes in classroom practice (15 minutes)

As one way to recognize the attributes, introduce during a segment of classroom instruction.

Have individuals read a selected vignette (examples, vignettes 4 and 5 on page 2 and 3 of this document)

In pairs, talk about it with respect to Guiding Question 2:

Guiding Question 2: What attributes of formative assessment are represented in these vignettes? Which specific parts of the vignette represent the attributes you have identified? Why do you think they are representative of each attribute?

Pairs share with another pair

Facilitator leads whole group conversation around the guiding question.

Activity 2B: Repeat with a second vignette (15 minutes)

*Conclusion of section (5 minutes)

Summarize the groups' discussions and ask participants to reflect on the attributes and how they can incorporate them in their formative assessment practice.

NOTE: Allow participants time to provide insights and share their own experiences.

The following vignette was taken from *Formative Assessment: Examples of Practice*. Council of Chief State School Officers: Washington, DC 2008. A work product initiated and led by E. Caroline Wylie, ETS, for the Formative Assessment for Students and Teachers (FAST) Collaborative.

Vignette 4: Language Arts, Lower Elementary

A lower elementary teacher had been working with his students on how to use the writing process to improve their own writing and to assist their peers. They were all working on writing personal stories around the topic of animals to publish in a class magazine. He introduced the idea of *Two Stars and a Wish* as a way of providing feedback which requires the reader to identify two positive aspects of the piece of work (the stars), and one specific suggestion for improvement (the wish). He began by explaining that the feedback he had given on their writing adhered to this very same principle. Now students would use the Two Stars and a Wish approach as they worked with each other in their writing groups. They discussed as an entire class the types of comments they might write when addressing positive aspects as well as comments to write when suggesting improvements. They also discussed the types of comments that would not be appropriate to write to a peer.

The teacher then reminded students about their current writing project. He returned the writings to each student and asked them to reread their essays and to review his comments. He then directed them to discuss with their partner the feedback given and specific ways they might improve on their next draft. During the student discussions, the teacher circulated the room, offering suggestions to those who had difficulties planning their next steps.

During the next lesson, the students revised their work and then began peer editing using the Two Stars and a Wish approach. He reminded them of the conversation they had about appropriate and inappropriate comments, of the type of comments he had written, and of the purpose of writing these stories to share in the class magazine. As students peer edited and provided feedback to their partners, the teacher again circulated the room and made suggestions, as necessary.

The sharing of the feedback process was repeated and students then had an opportunity to make revisions before submitting their final work for inclusion in the magazine.

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Vignette 5: Science, Middle School

A middle school science teacher decided that her eighth grade students were not benefiting as much as they could from the science inquiry experiments around which she structured her units. Her goal was that each week students would complete a lab report and, as part of the report, connect what they learned from the experiment to the “big ideas” that she was presenting throughout the unit. However, she realized that students were struggling with the lab report content, and she was spending much of her grading time commenting on earlier sections of the report rather than focusing on the connections that they were making to the big ideas. She had been using a “criteria-for-evaluation form” that described her expectations for the reports, but decided that it needed to be revised so that it was more easily understood by the students. Because the form was to be used by the students as they prepared their lab reports, she decided to allow the students to help her design the new instrument.

Before the start of the new school year, she pulled four student lab reports from the previous year, removing all identifying information. During the first class, she reviewed the criteria for evaluation form and then handed out the four student reports. Working together in small groups, she asked the students to rank the reports using the evaluation form and to justify their ranking. A member of each group was randomly selected to explain his or her analysis of one of the reviewed reports. Other students were then allowed to add their comments. Once all four reports had been ranked and discussed by the class, she presented the rank order based on her grading of the reports and tied it back to the criteria for evaluation form. She responded to student questions about her scoring of the reports. She then reviewed again the purpose of the experiments and the write-ups to help them better understand and make connections between their results and the big ideas of the course. She challenged the students to improve the criteria for evaluation form by creating their own check-lists that would help them do a better job on the lab reports.

Students then went back to their small groups, and reviewed again the two higher scoring lab reports against the criteria for evaluation form. They discussed how to describe the important aspects of the reports in their own words and from there developed their own list of important criteria. A second class period was spent compiling the ideas from each group, creating a final criteria list, and ensuring common understanding.

For each lab report that students completed during the year, students were reminded to compare their own work against the criteria list as a first check. Then the teacher allowed 15 minutes of class time each week for students to exchange draft reports with another student and to provide feedback. Students used the criteria list as they peer-evaluated the reports and followed a 2 + 2 feedback strategy (two positives and two suggestions for improvement). Students then made any final revisions that evening before submitting their final draft.

The teacher discovered that students were better able to understand her expectations using the student developed criteria list, and that the quality of the lab reports increased significantly along with greater depth of student thinking. Furthermore, she was able to spend more time focused on the connections that students were making to the big ideas which in turn helped her plan her instruction with a clearer sense of what they were still struggling with and what they understood.

Paper Strips

Make one copy for each group. Cut the strips and mix them up. Each group will need a set of strips to sort.

<i>Learning Progressions</i>
Articulations of the sub-goals of the ultimate learning goal
Descriptions of how concepts and skills build in a domain
Connections between formative assessment opportunities, short-term goals, and the bigger picture of how well students' learning is moving forward
Provides teachers with the big picture of what students need to learn, as well as sufficient detail for planning instruction to meet short-term goals.
<i>Learning Goals and Criteria for Success</i>
Clear identification of the purpose of the lesson
Identified from learning progressions
Requires clear communication to students
May include exemplars of performance
Indicate what a good performance looks like
Aligned to on-line State and District Standards
<i>Descriptive Feedback</i>
Related to the particular qualities of student learning with suggestions for improvement
It is not focused on comparisons with other students
It is not ego-involving praise
It provides information that will support students moving their own learning forward
Is related to criteria for success
On-line resources with worked examples with explanations
Automated, contingent feedback with sample appropriate response, explanation of the relevant concept or process

<i>Self- and Peer-Assessment</i>
Provides an opportunity for students to think meta-cognitively about their learning
Increases the number of feedback opportunities
Should involve reflecting on criteria for success
Is never part of a formal grading process
Guidelines for how students should work in pairs and small groups to evaluate work and discuss appropriate responses and revisions
<i>Collaboration</i>
A classroom culture in which teachers and students are partners in learning should be established
Students as bona fide partners in the learning process
Requires a classroom culture that is characterized by a sense of trust between and among students and teachers
Teacher is not the sole “owner” of knowledge