



“ *By including the Formative Assessment Practices within our work, we enhance the professional growth of the teachers we serve, and by helping teachers grow professionally, we positively influence outcomes for children and families.* ”

## **Formative Assessment Practices Series: In the Rubric** **by Dr. Rich Lambert**

We visit classrooms for short periods of time. We all know what we can directly observe during snapshots will never be enough to capture a complete and valid picture of a teacher’s performance. Yet all of us are committed to becoming skilled at making valid placements on the rubrics within the North Carolina Teacher Evaluation Process (TEP). So how can we use the limited information we collect to make the right placements? We find part of the answer to this question in the inferences we make from artifacts and evidence teachers give us during pre and post observation conferences.

I have always found conversations with teachers about formative assessment to be very helpful. The formative assessment process offers some of the best sources of evidence for making valid placements on the TEP rubric. In fact, formative assessment practices intersect with all areas of high quality teaching practices. In this article, we will review how each of the five standards contains some aspect of assessment practices.

**FOR STANDARD I**, knowing exactly how each child is developing and growing is part of demonstrating leadership in the classroom. Let’s review element Ia. “...Teachers use various types of assessment data during the school year to evaluate child progress and to make adjustments to the teaching and learning process...”

The rubric indicates:

- 1.) a Proficient teacher “provides evidence of data driven instruction throughout all classroom activities,”
- 2.) an Accomplished teacher “evaluates student progress using a variety of assessment data,” and
- 3.) a Distinguished teacher “uses classroom assessment data to inform program planning.”

Part of our role is to remind teachers that in an early childhood classroom, the formative assessment process (FAP) provides the most developmentally appropriate evidence of child growth and development. The FAP is also an important source of process evidence to understand a teacher’s instructional practices. We can learn so much about a teacher by asking about where they have placed particular children on GOLD progressions, and by asking them to show us the evidence that supports those placements.

Let’s review element Id. “...Teachers advocate for positive change in policies and practices affecting student learning...They participate in the implementation of initiatives to improve the education of children...” Formative assessment data can help teachers understand the unique needs of the children and families they serve. Furthermore, the FAP can help teachers advocate for and promote developmentally appropriate policies and practices in their centers.

Advocacy is most effective when it is data-driven. Teachers have a much more credible voice when they can demonstrate how the issues they are interested are rooted in the formative assessment data they collect in their classroom.

The FAP begins with teachers setting learning targets for children and understanding when children have demonstrated mastery of the next steps. Formative assessment measures such as GOLD outline the developmental progressions children follow and therefore make it easy for teachers to lead in this part of the instructional process. GOLD progressions help teachers realize what comes next for each child, and help them grow in their knowledge of what child behaviors to look for.

**FOR STANDARD II**, part of our role is to help teachers realize how a respectful classroom environment allows children to be themselves. Children who are comfortable and respected demonstrate more easily what they know and can do. A respectful classroom environment elicits more valid information from children than will emerge in a less open and engaging classroom. Let us review element IIc states "...Teachers treat children as individuals... Teachers maintain high expectations..." Formative assessment data helps teachers understand the next level of learning and development for each child on each instructional objective. Teachers cannot maintain high expectations and tailor support for the unique needs of each child if they rely solely on their general overall impressions of child progress. The FAP keeps teachers focused, in a systematic way, on what matters most for each child. Furthermore, when children participate in formative assessment by selecting evidences of their growth, and placing them in their portfolios, they learn how to develop high expectations for themselves and their peers. Children can learn to, and will celebrate their developmental successes, and the FAP is a great way to help them do so.

Let us review IId. "... Teachers adapt their teaching for the benefit of children with special needs... Teachers collaborate with the range of support specialists to help meet the needs of all children..." Formative assessment data helps teachers understand how to adapt their teaching to the unique needs of children. Formative assessment data helps teachers develop unique learning opportunities to meet the needs of all children. Furthermore, formative assessment data helps teachers provide specific information to support specialists.

Let's review Iie. "... Teachers work collaboratively with the families and significant adults in the lives of their children... Teachers improve communication

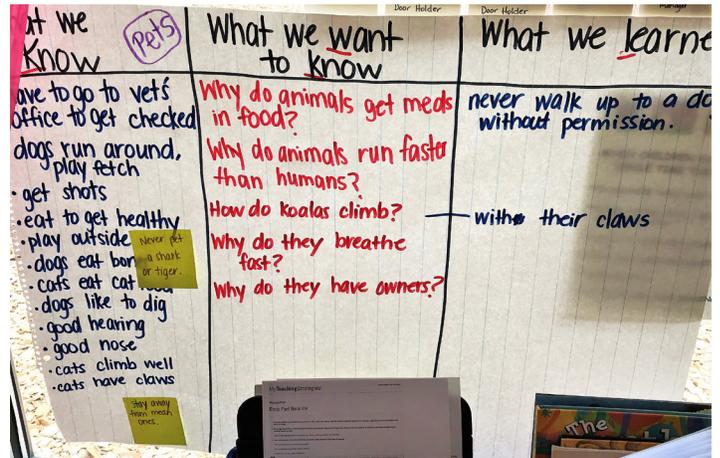
and collaboration between school and the home and community..." Formative assessment data can help improve communication between teachers and families. Formative assessment data helps validate and give credibility to a teacher's message to the family and other stakeholders. Data driven communication promotes trust and understanding by helping families and other stakeholders understand the developmental status of the child in specific terms that show exactly what a child knows and can do.

**THE SKILLS INVOLVED WITH STANDARD III** relate directly to how well a teacher interprets the evidence of child progress they collect in the classroom. After all, what does "Content Knowledge" mean for BK licensed teachers? It means they understand child development and use that knowledge to understand what they are observing as child develop. Let us review element IIIc. "... Teachers recognize the interconnectedness of content areas / disciplines..." In the early childhood classroom, formative assessment includes data about the whole child. For the teachers we serve, content knowledge means understanding the interconnectedness of all developmental domains. This interconnectedness becomes much clearer for teachers as they assess every aspect of child development. As they interpret evidence of child progress to make placements on GOLD progressions, they begin to understand the rich links between development across the domains. For example, physical and social emotional development often affects learning in other domains.

**WITH RESPECT TO STANDARD IV**, teachers need the high quality data the FAP can provide to facilitate learning, and to adapt and responding to the learning needs of each child. Let us review element IVa. "... Teachers know the ways in which learning takes place, and they know the appropriate levels of intellectual, physical, social, and emotional development of their students... Teachers differentiate their instruction accordingly..." In the early childhood classroom, formative assessment data provides the foundation for differentiating instruction and support. Formative assessment data helps teachers develop a holistic understanding of each child, including specific strengths and areas needing support. Element IVb states "... Teachers plan instruction appropriate for their children..." "There is such a wide range of developmental levels in the early childhood classroom. Differentiated instruction and support is the only way to fulfill the phrase "appropriate for their children."

Element IVc states “...Teachers use a variety of instructional methods...” Variety for the sake of variety will never be as effective selecting instructional methods intentionally to meet the unique needs of the children in the classroom. Intentionality in early childhood education is most effective and most meaningful for children when based on formative assessment data. Furthermore, element IVh states “... Teachers use a variety of methods to assess what each child has learned... Teachers use multiple indicators, including formative and summative assessments...” All teachers can benefit from the use of formative assessment, and this is especially true in the early childhood classroom given that summative assessment is less appropriate for young children. Furthermore, using formative assessment strategies helps children to learn to assess themselves, which in turn helps them learn self-regulation.

**FINALLY, WITH STANDARD V**, we all know high functioning teachers reflect about their practices regularly. The entire FAP helps them evaluate how well classroom activities are supporting child growth and development. For example, element Va states “...Teachers analyze student learning...” Formative assessment data helps each teacher think systematically and critically about children’s learning in their classroom. Teachers need to analyze evidences of child progress to make valid placements on GOLD developmental progressions and this process of analysis prompts healthy reflection.



**IN SUMMARY**, we have seen how formative assessment practices are contained within each of the NC Professional Teaching Standards. Therefore, if mentors and evaluators do not address formative assessment practices within their work with teachers, their work is simply incomplete. Both formative and summative evaluation of teachers without a complete examination of the FAP is very likely to result in scoring that is too lenient. Furthermore, if we leave the FAP out of our work with teachers, we are capping the professional growth that teachers can make. Mentors and evaluators who address the FAP within their work have richer and more impactful interactions with teachers. By including the FAP within our work, we enhance the professional growth of the teachers we serve, and by helping teachers grow professionally, we positively influence outcomes for children and families. As teachers grow and develop across their professional career pathway, we can use formative assessment data to help them document and evidence of their professional successes.



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