

Formative Assessment as a Literacy Support

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Educators look for ways to evaluate whether their children are learning and understanding lessons being taught. But how should one do this? One effective method focuses on formative assessment. Formative assessment is a process of using everyday routines, play, and learning activities that support teachers as they gather information over time and provide feedback so that they can adjust their teaching to meet the needs of all children (Riley-Ayers, 2014).

Formative assessment gives us data on a child's overall performance as opposed to **formal assessment** which measures children's mastery of learning outcomes. Formative Assessment is an important process used to measure children's growth. It is how learning and growth take place.

"I had a great deal of information, but it was not organized, and therefore not easy to use.... I needed a routine to make sure that what I learned from assessment became part of my planning and teaching." (Dichtelmiller, 2011)

Part of establishing a consistent routine of data collection through formative assessment is understanding the formative assessment process.

Steps for Formative Assessment

- **Identify an assessment goal:** Decide which children you need to assess and what you want to know about their progress.
- **Identify opportunities:** Find activities within your daily instruction to gather the information.
- **Reflect on the evidence:** Identify gaps between your children's current performance and expected goals.
- **Consider next steps:** Decide how you and your co-teacher will use this information to adjust your instruction. How will you differentiate your instruction to meet all your children's needs?
- **Promote engagement:** Asking children to share what they learn each day and encouraging them to take pride in their accomplishments. Consider how you might provide productive and specific feedback to build confidence.

Through the integration of authentic assessment methods, such as the formative assessment process, teachers can establish a better understanding of student interests and needs. This can directly influence a teacher's planning process by supporting projects and themes with the data that has been collected, but also influencing what data needs to be collected.

Any activity or lesson component can become an assessment opportunity if we change the lens through which we view the activity. -TK California: A Project of Early Edge California

Teachers can use formative assessment to encourage literacy skills in large groups, small groups, center time, gross motor play, and when working one-on-one with children. Data collection can also be supported through open-ended questions, talking with families, or evidence collected from therapists or service providers. By integrating families into the assessment process, families become aware of milestones and behaviors important to their child's development. As mentors and evaluators, we can guide educators to begin using formative assessment to assess literacy competency and use *Foundations* as a resource to guide their planning. *Foundations* includes Developmental Indicators that help teachers identify when children need support, are meeting developmental expectations, or exceeding expectations.

Goal LDC-1: Children understand communications from others.

Follow simple multistep directions with visual cues if needed. LDC-1m
Show understanding of increasingly complex sentences. LDC-1n

Goal LDC-2: Children participate in conversations...

Initiate and carry-on conversations that involve multiple back/ forth communications or turns. LDC-2m
Participate in a group discussion, making comments and asking questions related to the topic. LDC-2o

Goal LDC-3: Children ask and answer questions in order to seek help, get information...

Answer more complex questions with more explanation. LDC-3f
Ask specific questions to learn more about their world, understand tasks, and solve problems. LDC-3g

Goal LDC-6: Children use most grammatical constructions of their home language well.

Children speak in full sentences that are grammatically correct most of the time. LDC-6i

“Dual Language Learners learn grammar rules first in their home language. It takes longer for them to get the hang of the rules of the second language they are learning, and they may use the grammatical constructions of their home language even when they use English words.”

Some guiding questions for mentors or evaluators to use with teachers to support formative assessment and literacy acquisition are:

1. How do you assess literacy in your classroom?
2. How can you promote literacy-related play activities based on children's interests and topic of study?
3. What kind of authentic learning experiences can you provide to encourage children to experiment with writing?

4. How can you introduce new words and concepts when children are engaged in play?
5. What kind of visual cues can you use to help children understand instructions?
6. What kind of opportunities can you provide for Dual Language Learners?
7. How can you set up your book and writing center?
8. What kind of developmentally appropriate activities can you use to promote phonological awareness or print and alphabet knowledge within daily activities and routines?

As mentors collaborate with teachers in developing their data collection methods and encourage creating an environment that promotes growth and learning, some suggestions of engaging activities might be:

- Incorporating storytelling props or felt pieces to encourage retelling
- Allowing children to 'read' their own stories to the class
- Creating a print-rich environment through signs, materials, and posters
- Make sure books and writing materials are available in each center
- Support children in drawing, scribbling, and writing out stories, plans, lists, or signs
- Add in children's home language in labels, books, songs, and recordings
- Use technology as a reference to look up words or ideas

Resources

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