

Improving Teacher Practice – 6 Strategies to Improve Formative Assessment and Four Big Ideas for Developing Teacher Thinking¹

One of the keys to moving forward with the National Curriculum and the development of authentic learning environments is to develop strategies to empower the students to be the leaders of the learning. This shift allows for an extraordinary expansion of what can be learnt and attempted in a classroom and a school.

Halbert and Kaser, in their work with Canadian schools, have created the following six formative assessment strategies, as one approach to developing the students as learners. You will notice the strong alignment to Hattie's Visible Learning.

1. Provide learners with clarity about and understanding of the **learning intentions** of the work being done – this means that learners should be able to tell someone else, in their own words, what the learning intentions are and how they connect to life beyond school.
2. Provide to, and co-develop with, learners the **criteria for success**. This means that learners have clear criteria for quality and know what part they are aiming to get better at.
3. Provide **regular, thoughtful feedback** that moves learning forward for the individual learner. This means that, over time, learners get used to knowing how to improve.
4. Design and use thoughtful classroom questions to lead discussions that **generate evidence of learning**. This means that learners practise being ready to think and know that 'no hands up' and individual responsibility for thinking about the question are regular parts of learning life. It also means that teachers work together ahead of time to develop really strong questions to use part way through a learning sequence.
5. Put **learners to work as learning/teaching resources for each other**. This means that learners know strategies and have internalised quality criteria so that they can be productive with their same age and older and younger learning colleagues.
6. Do everything you can think of to make sure **that learners are the owners of their own learning**. This means that learners are genuinely engaged in learning and confident that they can learn and think about their own learning.

These strategies provide the direction for teachers to shape their students' learning.

¹ This article has been adapted from an article by Deborah Koehn entitled "The Power of Belonging",
http://www.cybertext.net.au/inet_s4wk4/p4_48.htm

Dr Halbert and Dr Kaser also developed the four big ideas that matter. These direct much of the teacher thinking:

1. **Learner self-coaching** through learning self-assessment is the goal of deep learning work.
2. **Nimble and responsive teaching:** teachers need to practice nimble and responsive planning and teaching to make formative assessment and learning a way of life.
3. **Inquiry-mindedness as a way of learning life:** inquiry-mindedness is using thoughtful strategies, and then looking for evidence of deeper learning, is a necessity for learners, teachers and leaders.
4. **Learning for all through networks:** as all teachers want to make a big difference for all learners – and especially those who are vulnerable – teachers need small networked communities of educators working together across roles and schools to get the gains for learners we need. Isolated efforts do not work for vulnerable learners. They need and deserve sustained and connected learning. Formative assessment is empowering for learners who need to get in on how the learning game works.

Professional learning communities are important. Just as students need to verbalise their understandings, adult learners need the same opportunity to examine their thinking. Action-based research questions provide an opportunity for teachers to use their intuitive intelligences, identifying personal and learning community needs and examining the effectiveness of teaching strategies.

As teachers work together, you are developing an authentic respect for each other's capabilities. The personal gains of working in such a supportive environment include developing strong relationships, receiving compassionate support from peers and a developing knowledge of ethical and moral purpose. It gives you the intellectual freedom to be a true learner and make mistakes, share your errors and gain from others' valuable perspectives that will guide your learning.

References

Halbert, J and Kaser, L *Formative assessment - the six big strategies that matter and formative assessment - the four big ideas that matter*, see <http://www.npbs.ca/>

Robertson, J, *Coaching leadership: building educational leadership capacity through coaching partnerships*, NCZER Press, Wellington, 2005.