OVERVIEW OF THE TEACHING PRACTICE

Because formative assessment is such an effective teaching tool, it should be employed often. Whether you're using project-based learning or more traditional methods, build time into your plans for the frequent use of formative assessment.

The purpose of formative assessment is to help teachers and students decide what to do next. Do we need to improve our work, or is it good to go? Do we need to learn or review something? Do we need to find more or different resources?

Formative assessment comes in many shapes and sizes. It can be informal, such as when a teacher observes students or sits beside them to talk about their work. It can be formal, such as a quiz, a piece of writing, or a reflection activity. Students can get feedback from their teacher, or formatively assess their own work, or give feedback to their peers.

A rubric is an excellent tool for formative assessment – it should not only be used for summative assessment when an assignment is finished or a project ends. A rubric for a product students create in a project should be shown to students early in the process, and used regularly. Using a rubric supports students in giving each other clear, specific, and useful feedback.

EXPLANATION OF THE ACTIVITY

TITLE: Stars and Stairs
GRADES: K-12
TIME: 15-20 minutes

PURPOSE: This activity can be used to teach students how to provide feedback to one another to improve their work. It also empowers students and leads to growth by giving them a deeper understanding of rubric criteria.

OVERVIEW

This process is a simple way for students to provide feedback to one another, both positive and growth-oriented. It can work well in any subject area. Younger students will need more scaffolding.

STEPS

1. Teacher or student selects work that requires feedback (work that will have an opportunity to be developed into a second draft) and has a rubric associated with it.
2. Teacher or student selects a specific aspect of the work (preferably from the rubric) to focus the feedback on.
3. Classmate gives feedback on the work using "2 stars and a stair":

2023 Defined, LLC

   a. **Stars** are specific areas that are worthy of positive feedback according to the rubric,
   b. **Stairs** are opportunities for growth based on the rubric criteria.
4. Classmate shares feedback and clarifies anything the receiver may need to know.
5. Students revise work based on stars and stairs.
6. Putting the feedback aside, the teacher leads a discussion with students based on the following questions:
   a. How did knowing your "stars" help you as you revised your work?
   b. In what ways did your "stairs" help you as you revised your work?
   c. Did this activity help you understand the rubric?
   d. What is something you changed as a result of the feedback?

NOTES

- Explain and use the protocol with sample work before beginning so students understand the difference between and importance of both stars and stairs.
- If asking students to provide feedback on each other's work, MODEL this first. Look at examples of stars and stairs and discuss what makes them meaningful to the receiver.
- Draw actual stars and stairs (or use a stamp) on a post-it note so students understand which comments go under which category.
- Some students may need support responding to feedback. For example, they may not understand how positive feedback can be used to revise. Modeling will help. (For example, a "star" could identify how a student used evidence to defend their reasoning. This might help them find places where evidence is still needed.)
- Some students may be sensitive to "stairs" feedback. Practice framing stairs in a way that is positive, actionable, and aligned to the rubric. Avoid giving too much feedback so students don't get overwhelmed.

2023 Defined, LLC