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Observations – Formative Assessment

Formative assessment is an important aspect of teaching because it allows for a teacher to see if their students are grasping the presented curriculum in the appropriate way. Since formative assessment allows teachers to make modifications in their lesson plans that are helpful to their students, without including formative assessment it is very difficult for teachers to teach effectively. I observed and conducted interviews with two teachers at Jim Thorpe Area High School and one teacher at Pottstown Middle School. Each teacher employed formative assessment in a variety of ways but all expressed similar reasons for why formative assessment is an important aspect of their teaching.   
 Mr. Eichelberger is a high school biology teacher from Jim Thorpe Area High School. Formative assessments are frequently used in his classroom, some of which he grades and others of which he does not. He expressed that formative assessment allows him to see how well his students are learning the material presented. This is important to him because it allows him to modify his instruction based on the students’ comprehension levels.  
 During the class time I was able to observe of Mr. Eichelberger, I noted two formative assessment strategies. In the beginning of class, Mr. Eichelberger handed lab worksheets back to the students. He proceeded to go over the worksheets noting what was done correctly and what was not done correctly. He spoke with students asking if they did not understand a certain aspect and discussed how the students can improve on their lab assignments. He also opened class with a drill question that was presented on the board. It was a review question along with a connection tied to what was going to be discussed today. The students wrote down the drill and answer in their notebook, which was handed in at the end of each week. Mr. Eichelberger was able to review their drill answers, correct them, and modify his lesson plans for next week if he saw certain objectives were not fulfilled. Each day, after each student wrote down and attempted to answer the drill question in their notebooks, the class discussed the drill question together.   
 I only spent one class period in Mr. Eichelberger’s room, which was a note-copying based period. It was difficult to observe the many formative assessments that Mr. Eichelberger uses in his classroom during this short period of a time. I think the drill questions are an effective way to formatively assess students. It allows him to see the original answer of each student in their own words, and the modifications that they made to their answers after the class had discussed the drill question. If he did not collect the drill questions weekly, it would not be a very effective formative assessment.   
 I observed Mr. Donahue, a high school and junior high school science teacher at Jim Thorpe, during his high school Meteorology II class and his 8th grade Earth Science class. For both classes, Mr. Donahue used drill questions as Mr. Eichelberger did as a formative assessment. During the Meteorology II course, the students were finishing their surface observation map activity and online pressure review. Mr. Donahue walked around and interacted with the students during class. He asked students about their work to see if they were doing it correctly and grasping the concepts. During the Earth Science class, Mr. Donahue behaved in the same way while the students did a Webquest activity after notes were written down and discussed at the beginning of class. This is a simple and effective way to formatively assess students because it allows Mr. Donahue to assist the students in the right direction while they are performing tasks individually. If he did not help students in such a way, it would be very easy for a student to become lost in the material or misunderstand it. Mr. Donahue stated that he uses formative assessments everyday in his class. By using numerous formative assessments, he thinks that it benefits the students learning and overall grade. The examples of the formative assessments that he uses in his classroom are quizzes, worksheets, labs, webquests, graphs, and daily warm-up activities.   
 I was able to interview Mrs. Eagle, a 6th grade teacher at Pottstown Middle School, but I was unable to observe her teaching because she was absent when of the days a attended. She uses formative assessments, such as hands on labs and written tests, according to the curriculum that she is teaching. Her classroom consisted of multiple subjects, therefore she had to use a variety of formative assessments that can be effectively used for which subject is being taught.   
 I was able to observe Mr. Oxenford, a 6th grade math teacher at Pottstown Middle School. He utilized white boards as an in-class formative assessment. I found it to be very effective. Each student had their own white board. Mr. Oxenford went through a series of math problems on the board that increased in difficulty. He decided if the class could increase the difficulty of the questions by assessing their answers on their whiteboards. He also asked students to explain the procedure of the question and how they got their answers throughout the class.   
 Each teacher I observed expressed that the use of formative assessments improves their students learning drastically. From what I observed, they all incorporated formative assessments into their daily lesson plans in class as well as out of class. They formatively assess their students during class my conversing with them and facilitating their learning progress. Outside of class time these teachers used write-ups such as labs, homework, and test, to monitor the students’ learning progress. The combination of such formative assessment, as well as others, benefits the students’ ability to learn efficiently.