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Formative action is a pedagogical method that ensures that teachers and students can get a better handle on the student's learning process... so that it becomes clear what the next step in the learning process should be.

The Formative Action School Blog:
Five Core Principles for Formative Action

WHAT IS FORMATIVE ACTION?

Formative action is a teaching method that uses ongoing assessment to gather real-time feedback on student learning. It helps teachers make deliberate choices about what material to cover, respond and adjust their instruction accordingly, and encourages students to take an active role in their own learning to achieve mastery. The key elements of formative action include:



GOAL-ORIENTED

FA emphasises the learning journey and making improvements towards a set goal.



RESPONSIVE TEACHING

FA uses diagnostic checks so teachers can adjust instruction based on students' needs.



CONSTRUCTIVE ALIGNMENT

FA aligns goals, activities, and assessments which saves time and reduces workload.



TRANSFORMATIVE FEEDBACK

FA uses feedback promoting hard thinking and actionable steps for improvement.

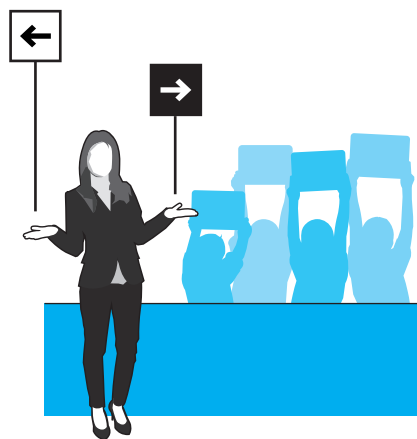


MASTERY FOCUSED

FA fosters student autonomy and develops independence and self-efficacy.

FORMATIVE ACTION

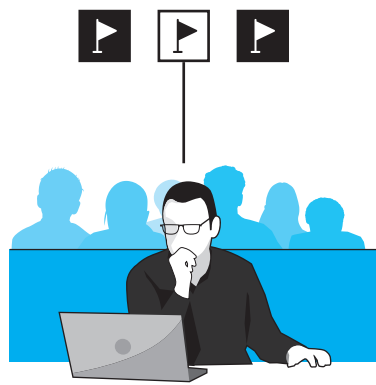
FIVE CORE PRINCIPLES TO TRANSFORM STUDENT LEARNING



CORE PRINCIPLE 1

Formative Action is not a method of assessment, but a method of pedagogy

Formative action is not merely a one-off assessment tool but a comprehensive and ongoing pedagogical approach. The formative action method focuses on understanding and improving the learning process rather than grading students with more formal summative assessments. Ultimately, formative action helps determine whether students have understood the material so that you can identify the next steps in your instruction. This means you must be goal-oriented and constantly ask yourself, "What information do we need now in order to decide on the next step in the instructional process?" and "What do I want students to think about right now?" To embed formative action effectively, plan to check for misconceptions and elicit information on whether students have mastered the material (aim for an 80% success rate before moving on). Carry out diagnostic checks using online tools (like Padlet or Mentimeter) or more traditional methods such as whiteboards or raising fingers to see an overview of student responses.



CORE PRINCIPLE 2

Formative Action is not going gradeless, but constructive alignment

The focus of formative action is on the concept of constructive alignment. This means aligning learning goals, teaching activities, and assessments to ensure a clear focus in the learning process. Grades are valuable and can still play a role in summarising learning outcomes at the end of a unit. However, during the learning process, the emphasis should be on using formative action to provide meaningful feedback that guides students toward achieving the set learning goals. To do this, start by formulating observable goals on what students should master independently. Next, build in interim checkpoints for your students to check their progress towards mastery. From this initial plan, you can produce a pedagogical road map. On the learning journey, utilise the testing effect and embed plenty of retrieval practice opportunities whilst providing time for students to revisit this material as often as possible throughout the year - use the three times rule recommended by Graham Nuthall's research in his book *The Hidden Lives of Learners* (2007).



CORE PRINCIPLE 3

Formative Action is no time-consuming data collection, but time-saving in practice

Formative action is a time-saving process and is not designed to increase teacher workload. Conventional methods of collecting data on where students stand can be time-consuming and can detract from the crucial task of acting on the data. It is not necessary for teachers to keep precise track of each student's development because the class as a whole often provides an overall impression of the mastery of the learning objectives. Ensure to move on when at least 80% of students give the right answer and provide additional instruction to the remaining students. Utilise diagnostic questions to check for understanding—strategies such as Cold Calling work effectively. Whiteboards can also help to collect real-time data from the whole class. To support or stretch learners, provide pathways of pursuit so they can follow up on the material with extra practice or move on to the next topic. Providing exemplar answers is also a powerful way to generate discussions about success for students to use in their own work.



CORE PRINCIPLE 4

Formative Action is not transmission feedback, but transformative feedback

Key research shows that overly detailed feedback has little impact on learning. For learning to be effective and long-lasting, students need to engage in hard thinking, as this helps the information stick in long-term memory. As Daniel T. Willingham puts it, "Memory is the residue of thought." This means that when students are prompted to think deeply about the material, they are more likely to remember and understand it. Transformative feedback is feedback given during the learning process that encourages students to think and take concrete steps to improve their work. The aim of formative action is to empower students to seek feedback in order to build independence and self-regulation skills. When designing your lessons, consider what actionable steps you want students to take and how best to fade your support. Effective strategies like Tom Sherrington's 5 Rs method encourage students to act upon feedback: Redraft or Redo; Rehearse or Repeat; Revisit or Respond; Relearn or Retest; Research or Record.



CORE PRINCIPLE 5

Formative Action not a full curriculum, but a clear and coherent curriculum

Teachers can often feel too overwhelmed to implement formative action effectively because they have too much content to cover in their curriculum. Jumping from one topic or assignment to another can be problematic as students are less likely to make connections between key ideas and lose track of their intended goals. It is essential for students to achieve mastery of the subject matter before moving on to ensure learning is coded in long-term memory. To do this, it is better to organise a curriculum that is less crowded so more time can be spent on deliberate practice. This requires making difficult choices, and it is essential that the conversation should focus on what the core objectives are in each subject. Start by engaging with colleagues in your department about the 'what' of your subject and think about the goals you want to achieve in each series of lessons. Subsequently, plan for quality over quantity and make sure that students have adequate time to achieve mastery in each topic in the curriculum.