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Formative action, developed by the Formative Action School is a teaching method that emphasises ongoing feedback and responsiveness in the learning process. It helps teachers make informed decisions about instructional adjustments and encourages students to actively engage in their learning journey.

WHAT IS FORMATIVE ACTION?

Formative action (FA) 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.

WHAT IS THE FA MODEL?

To clarify the practical aspects of formative action, The Formative Action School based in the Netherlands developed a comprehensive model that is built on five foundational steps that are integral to any effective execution of formative action. These steps can be performed by the teacher, the student, or collaboratively as a class, ensuring a cohesive and responsive learning process. The model is based on the following guiding questions:



GOALS: Get a clear picture of what you want to achieve. When will you be satisfied?



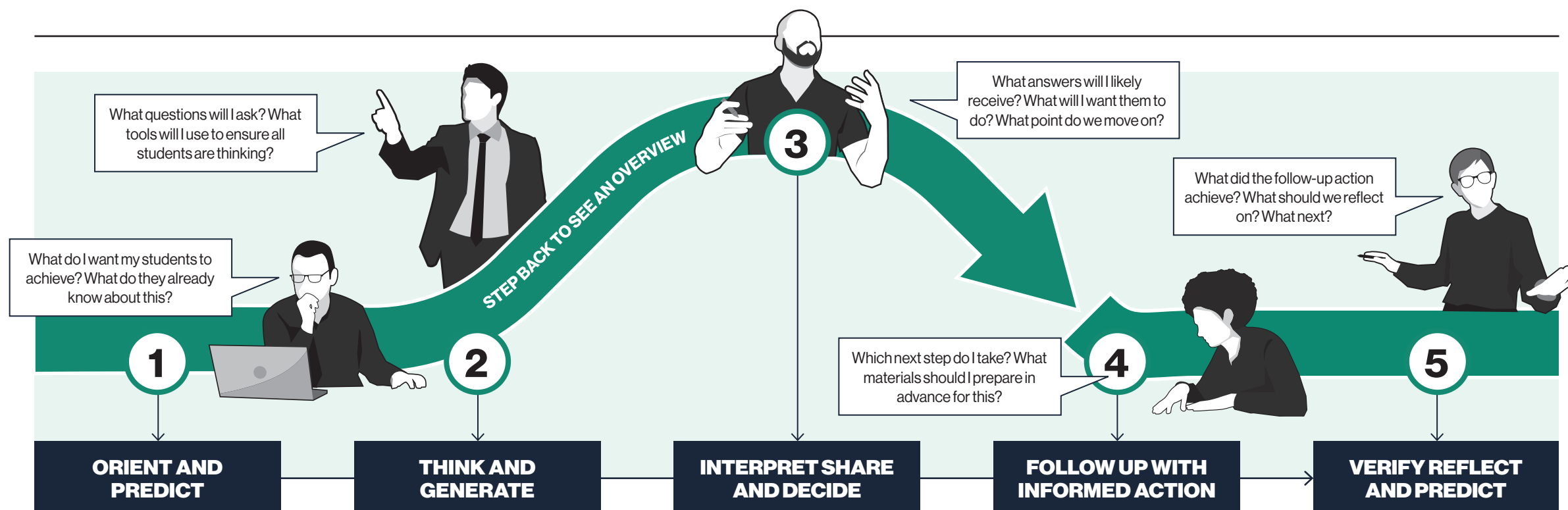
FOCUS: What do you want your students to think about during the process?



PROBLEMS: Which problems can I expect my students to face along the way?

THE FORMATIVE ACTION MODEL

A 5 STEP PROCESS FOR IMPROVING LEARNING, MASTERY & INDEPENDENCE



Design an internal road map to guide students from their current state of learning to the desired outcomes.

This initial step is a mental exercise for the teacher. Consider what aspects of the learning process you are curious about. Identify what students struggle with and the common misconceptions they usually have on a particular topic. Next, make a prediction about what students already know. This prediction helps maintain focus throughout the entire learning process. To do this, you can ask yourself questions like: "What do I expect my students to already know about this topic?", "What are the specific challenges or misconceptions students might face along the way?", and "What answers will I look for to confirm their understanding or identify learning gaps?" By orienting and predicting in this manner, you set a clear path for students' learning journey.

Encourage students to think and generate answers to gain a clear understanding of their thought processes.

It is important for students to generate independently without their books, notes or without talking to their peers. In this way, you also benefit from the testing effect because students have to actively remember information from their long-term memory in working memory. This improves long term retention. In this stage, focus on the quality of your questions to gain insights into your students' thinking and determine the quality of their answers. By utilising this approach, you get the answers you are looking for. For example, in a science lesson on plants and photosynthesis, check students' knowledge by asking them to explain a concept in their own words: "Describe the process of photosynthesis and explain the role of chlorophyll in this process."

Interpret and communicate about students' answers before deciding the next steps in the process.

Reflect on students' answers and determine if they align with your initial predictions. Encourage collaborative communication about their answers. Use strategies such as Think, Pair, Share or Turn and Talk, where students discuss their responses with peers to refine or clarify their ideas. This process provides you with a deeper understanding of their thinking. As the teacher, decide how best to proceed to the next step—students may even make this decision independently as they build confidence and fluency. For example, if only 40% of students answer correctly, you may need to provide additional practice or reteach the material. The goal is to achieve at least an 80% success rate among all students before moving on.

Use the information elicited from students previously to implement the necessary follow up action.

It is important to make an informed decision about the follow-up actions students should take. This logical step must be grounded in actionable activities that help students make adjustments and improvements. This might mean reteaching a specific topic or step, encouraging students to do more practice, or even making problems more challenging if more than 80% of students are getting the answers correct. An effective strategy is to provide different options for students based on their answers. For example, more successful students can advance to new material or design resources to support their peers. Meanwhile, students who are behind can engage in activities that reinforce key concepts and practice areas where they require improvement.

Check the effectiveness of the informed action and that the intended goals have now been met.

This last step is about checking for success and verifying that learning has taken place. This is crucial because when your students experience success, their motivation increases significantly. Depending on the level of success achieved, students can either move forward to the next part of the learning journey or engage in further improvement cycles of formative action. If students are unsuccessful, it may indicate the need for an additional cycle of formative action to address the learning gaps in understanding and to ensure students master the skill or material covered. You can check for effectiveness by asking yourself whether students' understanding has improved or if their progress is going better or worse than you originally expected.