Seven Strategies of Assessment for Learning

The Seven Strategies of Assessment for Learning organize research-based recommendations about assessment practices into an instructional framework that can improve student achievement. The seven strategies are structured around three formative assessment questions: “Where am I going?”; “Where am I now?”; and “How can I close the gap?” The framework is sequenced so that teachers can easily weave assessment for learning practices into daily instruction and assessment activities.

Where Am I Going?
STRATEGY 1: Provide students with a clear and understandable vision of the learning target.
Motivation and achievement both increase when instruction is guided by clearly-defined targets. Activities that help students answer the question, “What’s the learning?” set the stage for all further formative assessment actions.

STRATEGY 2: Use examples and models of strong and weak work.
Carefully chosen examples of the range of quality can both create and refine students’ vision of the learning goal by helping students answer the questions, “What defines quality work?” and “What are some problems to avoid?”

Where Am I Now?
STRATEGY 3: Offer regular descriptive feedback.
Effective feedback shows students where they are on their path to attaining the intended learning. It answers for students the questions, “What are my strengths?”; “What do I need to work on?”; and “Where did I go wrong and what can I do about it?”

STRATEGY 4: Teach students to self-assess and set goals.
The information provided in effective feedback models the kind of evaluative thinking we want students to be able to do themselves. Strategy 4 teaches students to identify their strengths and weaknesses and to set goals for further learning. It helps them answer the questions, “What am I good at?”; “What do I need to work on?”; and “What should I do next?”

How Can I Close the Gap?
STRATEGY 5: Design lessons to focus on one learning target or aspect of quality at a time.
When assessment information identifies a need, we can adjust instruction to target that need. In this strategy, we scaffold learning by narrowing the focus of a lesson to help students master a specific learning goal or to address specific misconceptions or problems.

STRATEGY 6: Teach students focused revision.
This is a companion to Strategy 5—when a concept, skill, or competence proves difficult for students, we can let them practice it in smaller segments, and give them feedback on just the aspects they are practicing. This strategy allows students to revise their initial work with a focus on a manageable number of learning targets or aspects of quality.

STRATEGY 7: Engage students in self-reflection, and let them keep track of and share their learning.
Long-term retention and motivation increase when students track, reflect on, and communicate about their learning. In this strategy, students look back on their journey, reflecting on their learning and sharing their achievement with others.

Key 1: Clear Purpose
Who will use the information?
How will they use it?
What information, in what detail, is required?

Key 2: Clear Targets
Are learning targets clear to teachers?
What kinds of achievement are to be assessed?
Are these learning targets the focus of instruction?

Key 3: Sound Design
Do assessment methods match learning targets?
Does the sample represent learning appropriately?
Are items, tasks, and scoring rubrics of high quality?
Does the assessment control for bias?

Key 4: Effective Communication
Can assessment results be used to guide instruction?
Do formative assessments function as effective feedback?
Is achievement tracked by learning target and reported by standard?
Do grades communicate achievement accurately?

Key 5: Student Involvement
Do assessment practices meet students’ information needs?
Are learning targets clear to students?
Will the assessment yield information that students can use to self-assess and set goals?
Are students tracking and communicating their evolving learning?


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