Formative Assessment Best Practices in Distance Learning

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Since March, schools all around the country have been shuttered, but that doesn't mean the learning stops at the classroom door. In the past month, school districts and educators across the country have grappled with the challenges of delivering an effective online education while everyone, both teachers and students, are stuck at home.

In the classroom, evidence of learning looks much different. Besides paper-based worksheets, quizzes, and tests, they prove it through science projects, artwork, class discussions, one-on-one conversations, and much more. But when the internet is the only available option, assessment and activity options are severely limited.

If formative assessment during at-home learning has you stumped, you're not alone! Here at Kids Academy, we know how hard teachers and parents are working to ensure that children continue to grow academically. But adapting to a completely new way of

teaching on very short notice, is challenging to say the least! That's why we've compiled a list of actionable ways to tackle formative assessment practices in the online environment. Consider the following ideas and practices as you continue to plan for your students' virtual classroom experience.

Online Learning: Formative Assessment from Afar

As you probably already know, some of the best practices we use as teachers in the classroom don't translate as well to an online setting, especially during this time of crisis when many families are struggling to deal with finances, and other related stressors that may not present as much of an issue ordinarily. To determine the most effective ways to assess and give students feedback, consider the following:

Work smarter, not harder. Harness online learning platforms

Online learning platforms are all-in-one apps that can be an absolute lifesaver for teachers! These are apps and programs have ready-made and fully customizable lessons and resources that teachers can assign, use, and monitor data.

Our Talented and Gifted app does exactly that, by providing teachers with a platform that delivers online learning activities and lessons, including worksheets, videos, games, and assessments. What's more is that the app tracks student performance and progress over a period of time and across subject areas to give teachers the data they need to differentiate learning and ensure that all students are receiving the best education possible given these strange times!

Provide timely feedback in a variety of ways

Providing children with feedback has always been an integral part of the formative assessment cycle but is even more important now that educators are faced with a setting that limits face-to-face contact and conversation.

With Talented and Gifted app, teachers get instant data they can use to provide children and parents with fast feedback regarding progress and performance. For instance, the quizzes within the app provide students with positive feedback while interacting with the content, and teachers have the ability to track progress and respond to student needs in a timely manner. Using this data, instructors can personalize synchronous learning experiences and offer interventions where needed.

Watch on YouTube

We know how hard teachers are working to ensure that students continue to learn. We're here to make your job easier with a special offer to our learning platform. Try the Talented and Gifted app for 50% off the yearly subscription price!

Focus on standards-based data

Many districts are turning towards standards-based grading instead of assigning traditional numerical or letter grades. While your district will stipulate the requirements for teachers at your school, it's important to remember what's important: that students demonstrate mastery of the content and standards. In our new virtual classrooms, especially with it being nearly the end of the school year, the focus should be less about letter grades or percentage points, and more about whether kids are ready to move on to the next lesson, unit, or even grade level.

To do this, plan for a variety of different types of formative assessments that can measure student learning over time, and in various ways. Some examples include utilizing class or individual student discussions, or by assigning work, having them snap a photo, and submitting it to a photo gallery or assignment submission box in your learning management system. Ask yourself: "does this student understand the content?" and use this data to drive your lessons.

Check in along the way

Don't underestimate the power of talking with your students and simply having a conversation with them! Conferencing is a powerful way to check for understanding, and

to check on other aspects of well-being, too. Set aside a time during the school day that can serve as your "office hours". Inform parents and students that you are available during this time or send out a form using a free online service. Ask your little learners to read you their writing or show their written work on the camera, and simply have a conversation as you might in the classroom.

Lastly, don't forget to check in with your kids regarding their emotional well-being! Some children face financial or family challenges at home, while others may be struggling adapting to social distancing guidelines and being unable to go to school and see their friends. Check in with both children and parents to ensure that the workload is reasonable, and that online schooling is as stress-free as possible. If families indicate that their lessons aren't working, or the work is too much, reconsider teaching approaches and modify where necessary.

Most educators and students would agree that they would much rather be in the classroom teaching, learning, and socializing with their teachers and friends. While the current situation is not in any way ideal, we must move forward to provide children with the best possible education under the circumstances to close out the 2019-2020 school year.

Fortunately, teachers can use some of the same tactics that they might in person, only adapted to the virtual setting. By using the practices above, teachers can use formative assessment strategies to monitor student learning while providing feedback and identifying appropriate interventions.