Teaching Toolkit—
Step 4 - Assessment Techniques

Potter County Conservation District

The term "assessment" is often synonymous with "test," however in both formal and non-formal teaching, a variety of different assessments exist, and should be employed. For best success in teaching and student learning, assessment methods are a must. This guide outlines types of assessment to consider in creating a lesson

1) Summative Assessment—"summary" assessments, covering a length of instructional time

Summative forms of assessment serve as less frequent, cumulative benchmarks to test knowledge and/or skills. Although many educators may categorize summative assessments with cookie-cutter, state standardized tests, these forms of assessment do play an important role at the classroom level. Summative testing is used as both a student grading measure and a test of a school's accountability in appropriate content coverage.

Examples of Summative Assessment:

- State assessments, standardized testing
- District benchmark or interim assessments
- End-of-unit or chapter tests
- End-of-term or semester exams

2) Formative Assessment—occurs simultaneously within instruction, within it's "form"

Formative assessment techniques come into play during instruction, creating a means for educators to find possible gaps in student learning levels, and the success or failure of their instructional techniques. Formative assessments occur much more frequently than summative assessments, and can be more creative in structure. These types of assessment ultimately point out where adjustments or additional facilitation is needed, and ideally work in a classroom to prevent a failing grade on the above mentioned benchmark forms of testing.

Another distinction that underpins formative assessment is student involvement. If students are not involved in the assessment process, formative assessment is not practiced or implemented to its full effectiveness. Students need to be involved both as assessors of their own learning and as resources to other students. There are numerous strategies teachers can implement to engage students. In fact, research shows that the involvement in and ownership of their work increases students' motivation to learn. This does not mean the absence of teacher involvement. To the contrary, teachers are critical in identifying learning goals, setting clear criteria for success, and designing assessment tasks that provide evidence of student learning.

Examples of Formative Assessment:

- Strategic Questioning—ask students thoughtful questions that lead to the higher-level thinking questions, "why," and "how?"

- Think-Pair-Share—a teacher asks one simplistic but higher-level thinking question, students individually write down their responses and related thoughts, then share their responses with a partner. An extension of this activity could be asking the partner to relay back to the group what the other student's response was

- 3-2-1 Countdown—this one works best at the end of a lesson. On note cards, students answer 3 things they didn't know before, 2 things that they liked doing best or were surprising, and one question they still have. These questions can be altered depending on the topic, but the basic premise of each should remain intact.

- Values Line—This gets students moving around, so be sure you have room. Pose two opposing views, each existing on an imaginary line on the floor. Instruct the students to stand on whichever end of the line they agree with. Students might choose the middle, or 1/4 of the way towards one end, etc.—this is a great way to initiate quality discourse.

If after completing your chosen Formative Assessments you find students aren't successfully gathering the information, try a few options for mitigation, listed below. These same techniques can be used deliberately, as an extension of your Formative Assessment, regardless of success/failure in synthesizing ideas. Although some are meant for the formal classroom, adaptations for non-formal education are possible as well.