Top 5 tips

Incorporating assessment into instruction

**Tip 1: Always start with the standards.**
When considering what you need to teach for a week, month, or even the entire quarter, start with your district standards. Examine each standard and ask yourself these questions:

- What are students learning in this standard?
- What background knowledge might they already have?
- What do I need to teach?
- How will I break down this standard into manageable chunks?

Be sure you are clear on the wording and expectations for each standard. If you cannot articulate the components of the standard, the details will also be unclear to your students.

**Tip 2: Create a summative assessment.**
Once you have determined the standards you will be teaching by unit or in a given time frame, the next step is to create a summative assessment. This assessment should adequately cover each of the standards identified. Ideally, the tasks in your assessment will vary in complexity, giving students the opportunity to use all levels of thinking when they demonstrate their understanding of the standards. These assessments are created prior to planning instruction so that teachers are clear about the final expectations for students. Assessment tasks should vary throughout the year so that students are exposed to many forms. Some examples include the following:

- Selected response items
  - Multiple choice
  - True or false
  - Matching
- Short answer
- Fill-in-the-blank
- One- or two-sentence response
- Extended written response
- Performance assessment

**Tip 3: Plan formative assessments.**
Knowing where you are starting (the standards) and where you will end up (summative assessment) provides “bookends” for your planning. But you also need to ensure that you know whether students are managing to get from point A to point B. Formative assessments will help you
determine this progress. Formative assessments help you gauge the “formation” of students’ understanding in the unit. They occur frequently and informally throughout a lesson to determine if students are moving in the right direction at the right speed. They help prevent an outcome on a summative assessment in which you realize that some students have not kept up with you for the duration of the unit. Formative assessments are like checkpoints, and these checkpoints can be spread across varying time frames, such as during a class period, at the end of a class period, or at the end of a lesson spanning more than one class period. They can be written, oral, or based on gesture.

**Tip 4: Incorporate metacognition into assessment strategies.**
To take assessment a step further, incorporating the learners’ metacognition—their awareness of their own thought processes—is a key method of helping students to accept ownership of their learning. Instead of passively observing a lesson, students who use metacognitive reflection can direct their learning and derive more from it. Teachers can use formative assessments as an opportunity for students to engage in metacognition. For example, we might ask students to demonstrate that they learned a concept by showing us on paper, but follow that question with, “What part of the lesson helped you arrive at this answer or what information do you still need in order to demonstrate this concept?” Teachers can also ask questions that are even more directly focused on student engagement: “What could you do differently during the next lesson that would help you learn the concept even better?” Additionally, it’s a chance for teachers to get feedback from the students while emphasizing metacognition. “What do you need from your teacher or the text to help you get to the next step?” Using metacognitive strategies allows students to take on responsibility and recasts students’ academic success (or lack thereof) as part of growth and learning, rather than the students’ fixed abilities.

**Tip 5: Use assessment results to drive instruction.**
Now that you have worked hard to create and implement both summative and formative assessments, be sure that you are using the results of these assessments to drive your teaching.

Consider the following analogy:

*Assessment is like a ride in a cab. When you enter the cab, you tell the driver your destination. The driver (instructor) has to stop at various stoplights along the way. At each light, the driver checks the street signs to make sure he/she is headed in the right direction. Formative assessments are similar to these stops. They are brief interruptions in the flow of the journey. The data from these formative assessments (street signs) dictates the route of instruction. Good instructors use these stops to evaluate if students are ready to continue down the road. Sometimes, drivers need to take a detour if there is an accident or road construction. Teachers also must detour in their instruction if the results of the formative assessments show that students are not ready to move forward. The*
destination (summative assessment) should not be a surprise if the driver (instructor) used formative data (street signs) along the way.

Teachers who follow these five assessment tips should find that their planning and instruction are intricately linked with the assessments in their classroom. Assessments that are driven by the standards, deliberately created, and used to inform instruction will help to ensure that students reach proficiency on each standard and that they are prepared to move forward to the following grade.