Formative Assessment Workshop Ideas from THE MAIN IDEA

Based on the ideas in *Classroom Assessment* for *Student Learning*
by Richard J. Stiggins, Judith A. Arter, Jan Chappuis, and Stephen Chappuis

Materials: Packets on quality assessments for teachers (make copies), self-assessment for teachers for Part I (either on newsprint or make individual copies), a teacher version of the agenda below (you will have to make this), teachers should bring a recent quiz/test or rubric (depending on the activity you choose for Part III).

Agenda:

I. Introduction – Help Teachers Understand What Constitutes a *Quality* Assessment (20 minutes)

A. Have teachers reflect on an assessment from when they were students that was particularly negative. Give them 5 minutes to think about it and write about it.

B. Then, hand out the teacher packet on quality assessments. Have everyone read (either silently or get someone to read it aloud) the 5 components of quality assessment in the teacher packet (Section I).

C. In groups of three, have teachers share their experiences with a negative assessment. Then have them look at the five components of quality assessments and discuss which of the five components the teacher violated.

D. Have a discussion with the teachers about formative assessment (assessment *for* learning) and how, unlike summative assessment, it can be used to motivate students and boost achievement, rather than just measure it. Let them read "Benefits of Assessment *FOR* Learning" in Section I of the teacher packet through the end of that section.

E. Once they've discussed and read a bit about formative assessment, tell the teachers that they probably already implement some of these ideas and ask them to self-assess themselves in this area by giving themselves a 1 (Never) to 5 (Always) ranking for each of the following statements (this can be a handout or written on large newsprint to hang up):

1. I understand the relationship between assessment and student motivation and use assessment to build confidence rather than defeat.
2. I articulate, in advance of teaching, the achievement targets my students are to hit.
3. My students can describe the targets they are to hit and what comes next in their learning.
4. I transform those learning targets into dependable assessments that yield accurate information.
5. I consistently use classroom assessment information to revise and guide teaching and learning.
6. My feedback to students is frequent, descriptive, constructive, and immediate, helping students know how to plan and improve.
7. My students are actively and consistently involved in their assessment and communicate with others about their achievement.

You may want to discuss some or all of these areas or save that for another time.

II. Articulating Clear Learning Goals for Students (15 Minutes)

Effective assessments need clear learning goals/targets (these two terms can be used interchangeably).

A. Have teachers look at their packet (Section II) and read about the different kinds of learning targets (knowledge, reasoning, skill, and product) as well as the Math and Language Arts examples.

B. As a large group, give teachers a sample goal to try to break into the four subgoals. You can use an academic example, or you can use the following goal: "Students will learn to drive a car with skill." Explain that this needs to be broken into more specific goals to help students understand what they need to learn. Write this chart on the blackboard and *leave the spaces in the right column blank*. Ask teachers to suggest what subgoals might fit into those spaces. (Suggested answers are below.)

1) What *knowledge* is necessary?	Know the law, read signs and understand what they mean, understand what different parts of the car do, etc.
2) What *reasoning* is needed?	Analyze road conditions, vehicle performance, etc. Evaluate safety options, etc.
3) Are any *skills* required?	Steering, shifting, parallel parking, etc.
4) What *products* are the outcome?	None

C. Then divide the teachers into groups by content or grade level. Each group can work on breaking down a larger goal for their content area (such as, "Students will determine the equation of a line given two points.") into the 4 categories above. OR, teachers can work individually on a goal they have for a lesson plan or unit they will be teaching soon.

III. Help Teachers Understand the Importance of Accurate Assessments (15 - 20 minutes)

A. Have the teachers read in their packets (Section III) what is involved in creating an accurate assessment. Note that there are just a *few* important points here – the book has a much more comprehensive section on the topic of accuracy.

B. There are many things teachers need to do to make sure their assessments are accurate. Due to time constraints, we will only include one activity here – either one that involves a test or a rubric. (The facilitator should choose *one* from below.)

You could have teachers bring in a recent test/quiz they've given and use the format below (in the teacher packet, Section III) to create a 'test plan' to show much importance they've given to each topic. Then they should discuss with a partner whether they did an accurate job of *sampling*, that is, does the relative importance of each topic match their own priorities for the unit?

TEST PLAN				
SCIENCE TOPICS	*LEARNING TARGETS*			*RELATIVE IMPORTANCE*
	KNOWLEDGE	**REASONING- COMPARES**	**REASONING – EVALUATES**	**TOTAL**
Concentrations of pollutants	10 points	0 points	0 points	10 points
Effects of Pollutants	7 points	8 points	0 points	15 points
How to Reduce Pollution	6 points	10 points	9 points	25 points
TOTAL	23 points	18 points	9 points	50 points

If, instead of a test, you want to look at *rubrics* for accuracy, you could have teachers bring in a recent rubric they've used. Have them read about rubrics and look at the example of a poor rubric in the teacher packet. They should take the rubrics they've brought in and critique them in pairs using the following (this is in the teacher packet). Note, they could rewrite their rubrics at home after doing this critique today.

METARUBRIC SUMMARY	
1. CONTENT – *Which learning targets count?* * Does it contain *all* items that are important? * Does it leave out what is unimportant?	2. CLARITY – *Does everyone understand what is meant?* * Are terms defined? * Are different levels of quality described? * Are samples of work included to illustrate these levels?
3. PRACTICALITY – *Can teachers and students easily use the rubric?* * Is student-friendly language used? * Will it help students assess themselves and set goals? * Will the resulting information help teachers plan instruction? * Is the rubric manageable?	4. TECHNICAL QUALITY/FAIRNESS – *Is the rubric reliable & valid?* * Is it reliable, meaning, will raters give it the same ratings? * Is it valid, meaning, do the scores actually reflect what students can do? * Is it fair, meaning will the rubric function the same with different groups of students? Are there biases?

IV. Help Teachers Understand How to Communicate Clearly (15 – 20 minutes)

A. Have teachers read about the four conditions necessary for effective communication in Section IV of the packet (targets are clear, information is accurate, symbols are understood, and communication is tailored). It is vital for teachers to use their communication tools -- report cards, portfolios, conferences and standardized tests – effectively.

B. There are two ways you might address the first communication tool – report cards. You could have a discussion about the authors' contention that we should only include achievement, not behavior (effort, lateness in an assignment, etc.), in report card grades. They believe for accuracy: ***Grades should provide communication about current levels of student achievement.***

Have the teachers read about this topic in the teacher packet (Section IV) and discuss the scenarios that show why schools might decide to only include indicators of achievement in report cards. This might be a difficult discussion as many teachers have used the same grading practices for years. Here are some questions you might use for either a large or small group discussion:

- Think of a time you have included behavior as part of a grade and it has been useful as well as a time when it backfired. Do you see any similarities with the case studies in the teacher packet? Will you share your own examples?
- Ask teachers where they stand on the following continuum from 1 to 10. Do they believe that behavior (lateness, effort, etc.) should be included in grades (1) or that grades should just reflect academic achievement (10). You can have the teachers actually get up and stand on a line where one side represents the '1' and the opposite side is '10.' Teachers can stand anywhere in the middle. Ask teachers to explain why they are standing where they chose to stand.
- Brainstorm what would have to change at our school for grades to *only* reflect achievement (i.e., the format of report cards would have to change, finding another way to give feedback when assignments or students are late, etc.).

Instead of this discussion, or in addition to it, teachers could consider changing the format of their gradebooks so that they convey more accurate information, all based on achievement. To more accurately reflect student learning, the authors say that grades should be recorded based on the *learning targets that have been assessed*. Instead of having columns in a gradebook for "homework" and "tests," teachers should have columns for "identifies place value to 10,000s" and "adds three-digit numbers in columns" like the excerpt below (see p. 289 for the full chart). Teachers can look at the chart below (in the teacher packet, Section IV) and discuss the possibility of changing their gradebooks:

EXCERPT OF A GRADEBOOK ARRANGED BY LEARNING TARGET (This is from the section on Number Sense)										
	Identifies place value to 10,000s					Reads, writes common fractions				
Date										
Task (SR = Selected Response; PA = Performance Assessment; Q = Quiz, H = HW; etc.)										
F (formative) or S (summative) – To decide whether it contributes to the final grade										
Johnny										
Rosa										
Rachel, etc.										

V. Help Teachers Think of Ways to Involve Students in Their Own Assessment (15 minutes)

Have teachers read through the 7 assessment *for* learning strategies (in part I of the packet). Then have them think of how they might involve students in 2-3 of these strategies. For example, in the first strategy, to involve students more in understanding the learning goal for the day, a teacher might save the last 3 minutes of class to ask students to write down what they believe was the most important learning goal of the day. Then discuss what the goal was so students can self-assess whether they understood the goal. Have teachers write down their ideas and turn the paper in to you. Then, they should email you a list of dates to observe these new ideas in effect. If the teacher needs more ideas, as facilitator you can draw from the list of 24 suggestions to involve students on the last page of the summary. In pairs, ask teachers to share the 2-3 new ideas they plan to implement. Have them discuss:

- Why did you choose these new strategies? Why do you think they will be effective?
- What do you need to do before implementing them?
- What obstacles might impede their success?
- How will you know if they are effective?