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***Education towards Freedom:  
Using Formative Assessment Techniques  
to Meet the Educational Goals  
of Waldorf Schools***

**Some Key Dimensions of Waldorf Education:**

- 1) Waldorf Schools organize curriculum and instruction guided by Rudolf Steiner's Developmental Model, emphasizing, in seven year cycles: Imitation (ages 0-7), Imagination (ages 7-14), and Intellect (ages 14-21).
- 2) Waldorf schools emphasize experiential learning—focusing on learning experiences and activities that integrate the fine and practical arts with academic and intellectual development.
- 3) Waldorf schools focus their programs on the development of the Whole Student: Growth in Capacities (head, heart and hands, thinking feeling, and willing) leading to balanced empowerment, self-direction, wisdom, and a life well-lived.
- 4) Waldorf schools are committed to Social Renewal, most directly through the qualities and capacities of their graduates--including a commitment to personal, social, civic, and global values and actions.

**A Short Summary of the Educational Goal of Waldorf Schools:** *To provide an educational environment, embodied in a set of learning experiences and activities that promote student growth, in which all students develop their full capacities as human beings and enter young adulthood prepared to live their lives well.*

*What matters most during actual teaching is an ability to meet the ever-changing classroom situations, which result from the immediate response of the pupils. But who in this wide world trains teachers to do that? Are they not trained to decide before hand what they are going to teach? This often gives me the impression that the child is not considered at all during educational deliberations. Such an attitude would be tantamount to making papier-mache masks of each pupil as he enters school to deal with these masks rather than with the actual children.*

*--Rudolf Steiner, Soul Economy and Waldorf  
Education, Lecture VIII, page 129*

*Often, when I observe in a classroom, the teacher is presenting the elements of the Waldorf curriculum as she has been taught to present them, but the teacher is so busy with her work of teaching, that she cannot see her student' educational needs with any clarity. At the center of education is student growth, the progress of the learner. The needs of the learners must guide the lessons.*

*It is as if the students are hidden under a blanket and the teacher is teaching over, above, past and beyond them. The teacher needs to draw her students out from under the blanket, to see them clearly as learning, growing individuals, to identify their current needs, to address those needs in their lessons, and to engage them actively in their own learning.*

*--Else Gottgens, spoken during a discussion with Waldorf teachers about assessment in Waldorf Schools, at Rudolf Steiner College, in 1998.*

## **What is Assessment, and what is its proper role in Waldorf Schools?**

*The conventional model of assessment in education: Teach, test, grade, move on. This can be described as, at best, auditing achievement.*

*Think of assessment as information for improving teaching and learning. . .to advance learning. . .by providing useful feedback to teachers and students that is then built into the process of teaching and learning.*

*--Grant Wiggins—co-author of Understanding by Design*

*We assess to gather evidence of student learning and development in its fullness. Such Assessments call on students" to make the invisible, visible" by demonstrating their learning and growth through what they say, do, or create.*

*--Robert Anderson*

## **What is Formative Assessment?**

### **A Useful Contrast**

Summative Assessment	--	Formative Assessment
<b>Assessment of Learning</b>	--	<b>Assessment For Learning</b>

## **The “Formative” Use of Assessment**

Although any assessment results can be used formatively to meet student needs and enhance student learning, to be used most effectively formative uses of assessments typically

- are embedded within the learning unit,
- indicate the current state of student learning,
- are designed to identify emerging student learning needs,
- result in comments and guidance to students for next steps,
- lead to additional, timely, focused activities to address the next steps and student needs identified, and
- monitor, inform, and enhance the effectiveness of the teacher’s next instructional choices, and
- monitor additional student learning progress.

All other uses of assessments and assessment results are “**Summative.**”

- Summative results come at the “end” of a unit of instruction,
- are final “summary” measures of student success in an activity, or unit, or course, and
- usually receive a “grade” or “points,” or “ranking”, or determine a summary performance level.

Typically, summative assessment occurs when instruction, an activity, unit or a grading period, is complete, the assessment results are final or summary, and, for now, students no longer have the opportunity to improve their work or learning and raise their grade or performance level. They are often used as “shorthand” for relative student success, for comparisons of students and schools, and for accountability purposes.

## **Clarifying Dimensions of the Formative and Summative Uses of Assessment**

### **When are assessments given? How often?**

#### **Timing—it’s impact and opportunities**

(Long Cycle, Interim Cycle, Short Cycle) (All can be Summative or Formative depending on the ways in which the results are put to use and their power to enhance student learning.)

Short Cycle Assessments (which are the most potent for the improvement of student learning) take place during instruction, within activity, or unit (minute to minute, day to day)—allowing time for midcourse instructional changes and/or additional student improvement at key points of contingency—“hinge points”). (Wiliam)

## **Who participates in assessments used formatively? What does formative assessment look like?**

The whole target group of learners. (See handout.) Examples: Feedback/response cards; white boards/slates; exit cards; group discussions, pair and share, questioning, with whole group participation in discussion, problem-solving and/or providing descriptive feedback. (No individual student “hands up!” to answer teacher, only for clarifying student questions.)

Activities observed, followed by descriptive feedback, and opportunities to grow within the activity or others directly related

Products created by students, with descriptive feedback provided and opportunities for revision and/or repetition

## **What do the results look like?**

Summative: Grades, points, performance levels, rankings

Formative: timely comments, criterion/description-based scoring guides (learning progressions), focused forward, positive, empowering, descriptive guidance to enhance ongoing student learning and development.

## **One Key additional Formative Component ( Stiggins)**

### ***Informing and empowering students to monitor and direct their own learning***

Typically, and greatly emphasized by Rick Stiggins, is the importance of communicating explicit learning goals to students (for the course, unit, activity, or assignment) to ensure that they become informed, engaged, self-reflective and self-motivated learners. Indicators of such an approach to self-directed student learning would include greater and greater degrees of freedom in choosing learning activities, guiding their own progress, and evaluating the outcomes. Teachers and students may work collaboratively, developing criteria identifying the key qualities and indicators of success on assignments; concrete teacher and peer comments may guide improvement during the process; and students may become empowered self-evaluators of their own learning, performance, progress, and growth, etc.

Although all students self-monitor as they grow, in a Waldorf setting this type of conscious self-assessment is introduced slowly and with great care as developmentally appropriate in ways that foster student engagement, empowerment, and growth. (This topic will be discussed in greater detail in the Alliance Handbook.)

## **Short, Expanded Description of “Formative Assessment”**

“Formative Assessment” is a shorthand label indicating a set of assessment practices and uses of assessment results that are designed and implemented as one component of a formative approach to instruction and student learning.

The core feature of formative instructional programs is that instruction be designed and implemented to build upon the current state of student learning and to maximize student learning in the most effective way by meeting student learning needs as soon as they are identified. This goal is complicated in the classroom by differences in individual student readiness for instruction and differences in student responses to the instruction itself.

In such an approach to instruction, assessments are designed and used to elicit indications of student progress “during” the learning process—by making that progress visible. The assessment results are used to ensure that all students are succeeding, and that students who are having difficulty can receive the instruction that they need in a timely way to maximize their progress in learning. The indicators of student achievement (assessment results) are generated throughout instruction

- to verify student progress and/or
- to identify unmet student learning needs in a timely enough way to ensure that students receive the opportunity to learn and can continue to grow.

**The assumption in such an approach to instruction is that instructional plans, processes, and assistance to students will be adapted during instruction as necessary to meet the learning needs of all students.**

*See the quotes from Steiner and Gottgens on Pages 1 and 2, above.*

### **The Formative Use of Assessment Results: How do I know it when I see it?**

Assessment results are used formatively if they guide teachers and schools to

- Identify specific indicators of individual student learning during the instructional process (often whole group assessment with a visible response from each student)and
- Focus on meeting the specific student academic needs of all students,
- Identify timely instructional approaches and learning activities designed to meet those needs,
- Take timely actions, often during the learning process, introducing new learning experiences and activities expected to lead to accelerated student learning,
- Evaluate the success of those actions in terms of student growth and increases in learning.

### **Formative Assessment Outcomes**

- Formative assessments directly serve teaching and learning in the classroom—they inform and empower teachers and students.

- Classroom teachers see individual student progress and achievement more clearly and specifically. Students see more clearly what they can do to continue growing.
- Teachers get results quickly so that they can be used to alter instructional plans to best meet classroom, small group, and individual student needs.
- Assessments are designed to produce results that are “fine-grained” enough (specific and detailed) to assist teachers in identifying student learning needs, curricular and instructional shortcomings, and appropriate re-teaching and alternative instructional strategies
- Students obtain the constructive, specific feedback and guidance they need to feel informed and empowered to move their own learning forward successfully.

### **Formative Assessment: Supporting Faculty work in the Classroom with Collegial Faculty Work Together**

To put formative approaches to teaching and learning (including the formative uses of assessment) into practice in all classrooms throughout the school, the school’s administration will support and schedule regular opportunities for an ongoing faculty learning community with its focus on enhancing the work of teachers with students--including the formative use of assessments. This FLC will focus on developing the tools and pedagogical capacities necessary for the success of individual classroom teachers and fully support the learning of their students.

Teachers can use this ongoing, structured collaborative opportunity to identify, choose, design, or create powerful learning experiences, student activities, assignments, and formative assessments fully aligned with the goals of Waldorf education.

The successful implementation of such a process will take considerable planning to ensure the effectiveness of the faculty’s efforts. This faculty learning community presents the faculty itself with a self-designed formative opportunity for their own growth, as individuals and colleagues. A description of the key components of such a process will be available to Alliance schools and teachers in the “Implementation” portion of the Formative Assessment Handbook and in draft form prior to the end of this school year.

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