



LEARNING POINT

Models of proficient achievement: Why are they important?

A key element of the formative assessment process, models of proficient achievement provide concrete examples of the desired product or performance for a learning target. These models show students the qualities of student work that constitute successful performance related to a specific assignment. They are aligned to the learning target in order for the student to address the guiding question: Where am I going?

Such models provide clarity to students about what meeting the learning target entails. Models of proficient achievement provide a way to communicate success criteria to students. Success criteria also can be communicated to students through worked examples, rubrics, and checklists. Models provide both the teacher and students with a clear example to guide work toward the learning target. Student involvement in using models of proficient achievement can support reflection, self-assessment, and self-regulated learning.

Models of proficient achievement defined

Models of proficient achievement (also known as exemplars) are examples of successful demonstration of learning through a product or performance. They are tools teachers and students use to identify what consti-

tutes successful achievement of a learning target. Models of proficient achievement can be used to give students a clear understanding of what excellent work (as well as work “on the way to excellent work”) can look like and provide opportunities for students to improve.

It is important to note that models of proficient achievement may not always be possible or appropriate for certain lessons. They also differ depending upon the grade level and content area. In a variety of different ways, models of proficient achievement provide an important guidepost for students to understand what constitutes successful work.

Applications to practice

Initially, the teacher may develop the models of proficient achievement, but over time, the teacher may be able to select examples of actual student work. Teachers and students can review a model of proficient achievement to identify the success criteria for the the learning target. Engaging students in this criteria-setting process helps them more deeply understand the success criteria, and in the end, take ownership of their work. It also provides important information on what students do and do not know about a particular target. Overall, students can use the models of



We may need to teach less in order for the students to learn more. Teach less more carefully, and discuss it with our students. We need to clarify the purpose and expected outcomes of the tasks we design for students, and give them specific, clear and constructive feedback, and the chance to use that feedback to improve their own work.

(Sutton, 2000)



proficient achievement to guide their independent work.

During instruction, teachers can use models of proficient achievement to engage students in thinking about the learning target and what success might look like in a variety of ways. The teacher can present different models of proficient achievement, and have the student generate a list of the qualities and characteristics of the work that make it a model.

Teachers can also have students use a rubric to assess a model of proficient achievement to deepen their understanding of the criteria for success. Following the completion of an assignment, teachers can provide examples or models at various levels of achievement for students to use to review their own work and assess their current level of understanding or skill and what may be needed to move to the next level.



Teachers can gain greater insights into students' understanding of the learning target as students list criteria or elements of successful work from a model. Teachers can also identify and address student misunderstandings. Ultimately, formative assessment must be embedded in the discipline

To learn more

Formative assessment: What do teachers need to know and do?
Margaret Heritage. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 89(2), 140-146.

<https://bit.ly/3yvG0PJ>

What do we mean by formative assessment?

ALN Learning Point (Michigan Assessment Consortium, 2016).

<http://bit.ly/LP-FormativeAssessment>

What are learning progressions?

ALN Learning Point (Michigan Assessment Consortium, 2018).

<https://bit.ly/LP-Progressions>

Learning targets: How students aim for understanding in today's lesson.

Connie M. Moss and Susan M. Brookhart. (ASCD, 2012)

<https://www.ascd.org/>

Using formative assessment to enhance learning, achievement, and academic self-regulation

Heidi Andrade and Margaret Heritage (Routledge, 2018)

<https://www.routledge.com/>

in which it is carried out, and models of proficient achievement provide clear examples of proficiency in specific content areas.

As teachers involve students in the use of models of proficient achievement in various subject areas, they can:

- Analyze models of proficient achievement on a writing activity and develop a list of criteria of effective aspects of the work.
- Examine worked mathematical problems and compare the work to a rubric or checklist.
- View a social studies presentation and list specific indicators of quality and success.
- Review a range of models at different levels of achievement on a science assignment to determine the student's current level of performance and next steps in learning.

Summary

Teachers often begin by focusing on one element of the formative assess-

ment process and then build competence over time. The teacher intentionally plans instruction based on clear understanding of what he or she wants the students to learn within a progression of learning. The teacher decides when models of proficient achievement are appropriate for a given lesson and content area. When a model is presented, the teacher explicitly teaches students how to use the model, and students consistently use the model to guide their independent work. The teacher and students engage in discourse about the model to improve their understanding of the learning target and success criteria. Students have opportunities to reflect on the model of proficient achievement and to articulate what they notice about the model as well as their own work.

Through explicit instruction, dialogue, and reflection, models of proficient achievement can be an effective tool to support student agency and clarity

Reference

Year 8 and year 9: Overcoming the muddle in the middle. Ruth Sutton. (Ruth Sutton Publications, 2000)

The Michigan Assessment Consortium's Assessment Learning Network (ALN) is a professional learning community consisting of members from MI's professional education organizations; the goal of the ALN is to increase the assessment literacy of all of Michigan's professional educators.