Principles of Formative Assessment

This document presents twelve principles that undergird formative assessment practices. They were developed by leaders of the *Formative Assessment for Michigan Educators* (FAME) team after a deep examination of exemplary formative assessment practices in several elementary and secondary school classrooms.

What is formative assessment?

"Formative assessment is a range of practices that encourage both teachers and learners to seek evidence of the ways in which students are developing their knowledge, skills and understanding with the intention of using the evidence to inform ongoing learning. Formative assessment requires a dynamic approach to assessing learning with assessment opportunities embedded into the ongoing learning activities and interactions in the classroom. Evidence of learning for both teacher and student use is generated from these classroom activities, is explored, and then acted upon during the learning" (Harrison & Heritage, forthcoming).

The practices of formative assessment will vary according to the discipline within which they are enacted, the grade-level of the students and the funds of knowledge that students bring with them to the learning context. It is useful to think about the principles that undergird formative assessment practices so that there "is consistency of principle, not uniformity of practice" (Harrison & Howard, 2009, p.3).

Principles:

1. **Process embedded in on-going practice**
   - Is not an adjunct to practice
   - Does not 'sit on top' of practices
   - Is not a test or an event
   - Is embedded in the ongoing flow of activity and interaction within the lesson
   - Is how teachers and students do business in the classroom

2. **Collaborative culture**
   - Safe environment established where students are willing to share their thinking
   - Students know they are responsible for their own and other's learning
   - Routines, expectations and structures for collaboration are established

3. **Careful consideration of what you want students to learn**
   - Planning based on current evidence of learning
   - Consideration of current learning within a longer trajectory of learning

4. **Clarity of learning (student & teacher)**
   - Clear learning goals and success criteria for the lesson
   - Communicated to or co-developed with students

5. **Intentional evidence gathering from multiple sources**
   - Teachers plan formative opportunities (what students say, do, make or write) within a lesson
   - No single way to obtain evidence
   - Several sources are needed to inform next steps
   - Self- and peer assessment is a source of evidence

6. **Meeting the students where they are**
   - Teachers respond in immediately or near immediately to a student's current learning status based on evidence
   - Response is intended to take students from where they are to where they can go next
   - High quality feedback is provided to students

7. **Involving students in learning & assessment**
   - Sharing learning goals and success criteria with students
   - Providing feedback that students can use to advance their own learning
   - Teaching peer and self-assessment skills
   - Helping students set goals

8. **Discourse-based learning environment**
   - Student engage in discourse to learn with and from each other
   - Teacher engages in discourse with students to support the development of thinking
   - Discourse is used as a source of evidence

9. **Students using each other as resources**
   - Teaching skills of peer feedback
   - Providing opportunities for peer feedback
   - Asking each other questions, clarifying ideas, building on each other's thinking

10. **Giving students the tools**
    - Provide tools to support self-assessment and peer feedback (e.g., templates, sentence stems)
    - Predictable classroom structures and routines

11. **Flexibility**
    - Adapting instruction based on evidence
    - Willingness to change course based on evidence
    - Nimble teaching
    - Students are responsive to feedback and to their own self-assessment

12. **Continually engage in reflecting on and improving current practice**
    - Reflecting on effectiveness of practice individually and with colleagues
    - Strive to keep improving

References

Harrison, C., & Heritage, M. (forthcoming). *Assessment for learning: 20 years of impact in U.S. and U.K. classrooms.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Harrison, C., & Howard S. (2009). Inside the primary black box: Assessment for learning in primary and early years classrooms. London: GL Assessment.