

# PIIC News

The Pennsylvania Institute for Instructional Coaching

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## How A Bag of Skittles is Driving Formative Assessment

By Jodi Geyer, Steel Valley SD Instructional Coach

"Taste the Rainbow of Formative Assessment" is quickly becoming a tag line for teachers at Steel Valley SD, thanks to Skittles candy and an instructional coach who likes acronyms. Summarize, KWL, I Used to Think Now I Think, Three Things, Ticket Out the Door, Likert Scale, Exit Slips, and S-O-S are just some of the formative assessment strategies on which teachers are coached.

So how does it work? Like most ideas in schools it begins with perseverance, a little bit of luck, and finding a willing audience.

Every session begins with sugary deliciousness as thanks to the teachers who are using the resources of the coach and the students' data to drive their instruction. At the beginning of the year, all teachers receive an invitation with a bag of Skittles attached and were asked to identify the type(s) of formative assessment strategy about which they wanted to learn more. Finding out which teachers were looking for help and what help they needed is the pre-B, or *Before-the-Before* of the *Before-During-After (BDA)* cycle of coaching. The *Before* meetings occur during the teachers' prep periods and are specific to the formative assessment strategy the teacher selects. The *During* meetings are easy to schedule because these are the visits where the data collection takes place and the coach supports and demonstrates how they would incorporate them into their lessons. This is when the instructional coach can support and demonstrate how to use a ticket out the door or the KWL chart. Because change is a slow process, coaches can encourage teachers to work toward small but consistent changes while supporting them through discussions about recourses and demonstrations. Though it can be difficult to schedule *After* sessions, using charm, more candy, and reminders that this opportunity for reflection can lead into

more discussions regarding new strategies (hence the next *Before-the-Before*) help make the *After* conversations take place.

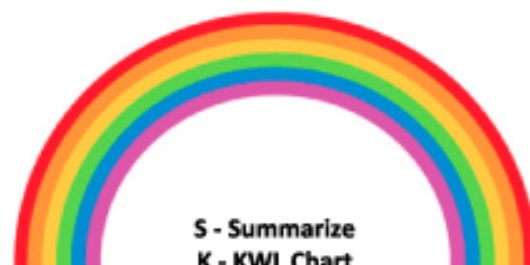
The Skittles idea began last year as an enticing offer to encourage teachers to work with their coach. It was preceded by Twix month, where all teachers were assured that their work with the coach would stay *betwixt* teacher and coach. Devoting time to discussing relevant formative

assessment strategies is an opportunity for coaches to continue to build relationships. In order to change the teachers' preconceived

notions of formative assessments, teachers can work closely with the instructional coach to develop a better understanding of how they can be used in the classroom. This level of embedded professional development is, hopefully, changing the culture of our school- one teacher, one student, and one Skittle at a time!

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### SKITTLES TASTE THE RAINBOW OF FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES



S - Summarize  
K - KWL Chart  
I - I Used to Think, Now I Think  
T - Three Things  
T - Ticket Out the Door  
L - Likert Scale  
E - Exit Slip  
S - S-O-S

**PIIC'S MISSION:** To support instructional coaching which helps teachers strengthen instructional practice, increase student engagement, and improve student learning.

## Letter from PIIC's Executive Director

Assessments are supposed to guide instructional practice and should be about growth. If that is true, why is designing student assessment so challenging? Maybe we don't really understand the purpose of assessment. Or, we don't focus on the different kinds of assessment. Or, maybe we confuse assessment that occurs before and during instruction with assessment that occurs at the end of a unit. (Think **BDA** with an eye on assessment for learning.) One is clearly an assessment of what students understand before class and then during the actual teaching to check for understanding; the other is an assessment of what students have learned as a result of what was taught. One is formative; that is, it should help shape the instruction through feedback and ongoing conversations between the teacher and students; the other is summative; that is, it gives a summary to help the teacher understand what students learned and where the gaps in learning exist.

In Kathy Dyer's blog ([www.nwea.org/blog](http://www.nwea.org/blog)), she shares Dylan William's definition of formative assessment: "... *a planned practice to elicit evidence of learning minute to minute, day by day in the classroom along with non-summative assessments that occur while content is still being taught. Both of these can inform teachers of what students know or do not know, helps students understand what it is they are ready to learn next, so teachers can adjust their instruction accordingly for each of their students.*" It is a guiding practice that shapes instruction. If we only rely on assessments at the end of a unit of

study to indicate progress, it's too late to make instructional adjustments.

So, is the assessment about what the students learned or about what was taught? Is the assessment about what the students understood or a result of the teacher's instructional practices and how those practices were communicated to the students? What happens when we can't tell when a student is learning and we move our instruction forward without understanding where we need to make adjustments in our teaching? What happens if we only use assessments as an academic evaluation? What happens if we fall into the trap of using assessments to only document how students perform and not what they can "do" with their learning? Remember, assessment and grading are not the same!

Instructional coaches must help teachers understand what kinds of assessments are tied to their goals and appropriate to use; more importantly however, they must help teachers use the information from the assessments to influence their instructional practices. Personalizing instruction to meet students' needs is a deliberate and intentional process actualized through the **BDA** cycle of consultation and through an ongoing, job-embedded professional development plan that incorporates the use of assessments for learning across all content areas. Instructional coaches need to collaborate with their teaching colleagues to help them understand which assessment strategies are effective, plan how and when to use those appropriate assessment strategies, and provide support to

teachers so that practices are discussed in reflective, non-evaluative ways promoting changes in implementation.

Five formative assessment suggestions for coaches to discuss with their teaching colleagues throughout the **BDA** cycle of consultation:

- Intentional questioning strategies, e.g., questions to check understanding and identify learning gaps
- Feedback on student work, e.g., ungraded projects or response journals designed to improve work and helps teachers determine "where" students are in the learning process
- Ticket out the door or exit slips to help the teacher make necessary adjustments for the next day
- Student self-assessments to help the student recognize his/her strengths and areas of needed support during the learning experience
- "Ask three before me" approach where students ask their peers probing questions to help them deepen their learning before asking the teacher

There are many assessment strategies that implemented effectively make a difference in classrooms. The coach has a critical role in this process to maintain and sustain a healthy learning environment for all. Assessments make learning and thinking visible for both students and their teachers. Make this a learning focus for the year.

Sincerely,

*Allen B. Eisenberg*

Please access PIIC's online resource, **The Instructional Coaching Resource Guide:**  
[www.instituteforinstructionalcoaching.org](http://www.instituteforinstructionalcoaching.org)

## Embedded Formative Assessment

Book Review by Barbara Wilkinson, IU 29 PIIC Mentor and Missy Petrilak, IU 20 PIIC Mentor

Student achievement is the main focus of every educator. Mentors and coaches have the responsibility to provide teachers with the opportunity to learn relevant, effective, and useful teaching and learning practices that support student achievement.

As a coach looking for meaningful strategies to use with your teachers, Dylan William promotes the practice of formative assessment

with plenty of research to support it while providing over fifty practical techniques for the classroom in his book,

Embedded Formative Assessment. He calls formative assessment, "the bridge between teaching and learning."

When reading the 5 key strategies from Dylan William's book, we couldn't

help think about the formulated questions from the **Before-During-After (BDA)** coaching cycle. There seems to be

*"There seems to be a number of correlations between some standard BDA questions and William's 5 key strategies."*

*Continued on page 3, Embedded Formative Assessment*



a number of correlations between some standard **BDA** questions and Wiliam's 5 key strategies. For example:

- Clarifying, sharing and understanding learning intentions and criteria for success - *What would you like your students to learn from this lesson? How will you know you have achieved your goals? What will your students get out of this class?*
- Engineering effective classroom discussions, activities, and learning tasks that elicit evidence of learning - *What does the ideal scenario look like the students' engagement with the new content? What activities worked best?*
- Providing feedback that moves learning forward - *How do you define proficiency? Is there continuous assessment? Do the students know what is expected of them? How would you judge your students' performance? Let's look at some of the student's work....*
- Activating learners as instructional resources for one another - *What is your role, the students' role, and the coach's role in this lesson? What will students get out of this lesson?*
- Activating learners as the owners of their own learning - *Is the lesson student or teacher driven? What is the level of student engagement?*

Wiliam notes, "Feedback needs to direct attention to what's next, rather than focusing on how well or badly the student did

on the work (pg. 128)." Embracing feedback from mentor-to-coach or coach-to-teacher works on the same premise of the PIIC Model of Effective Coaching quadrant, reflective and non-evaluative practices, directing attention to what's next.

The book, *Embedded Formative Assessment*, is a great resource for instructional coaches and mentors with vivid examples of what formative assessment looks like in the classroom. We give this book two thumbs up! His latest 2015 book on formative assessment

is called *Embedding Formative Assessment: Practical Techniques for K-12 Classrooms*.

For more information, please contact: Barb Wilkinson, wilkb@iu29.org

Wiliam, Dylan. *Embedded Formative Assessment*. Bloomington: Solution Tree Press, 2011. Print.



## 25 Flavors of Formative Assessment

By Lee Ann Miller, Sharon City SD Instructional Coach

Bell ringers, thumbs-up, thumbs-down, thumbs-sideways, turn and talk to your partner, red card, green card, random reporter, clickers, accountable-talk circles and exit slips. These are all great ways to formatively assess our students, but using strategies without planning is reckless. It's like ordering 25 flavors of ice cream to be eaten all at once from the same bowl. You don't really get to taste the individual flavors. The flavors melt together and pure wonderful, dark, chocolate chunk is randomly melted with orange crush, birthday cake, banana, bacon and mint. This is where coaching comes into play.

Using the *Before-During-After (BDA)* coaching cycle and the Model of Effective Coaching from PIIC creates a wonderful structure to talk about and implement formative assessment to build coaching and teaching practices. Sitting and planning with teachers using the Model of Effective Coaching during the *Before* coaching session provides an opportunity to talk about

what strategy a teacher might use to assess learning. We can explicitly plan to use a Type One writing to check quickly for understanding of the homework or the lesson from the day before. Moving to the "Pair Share" part of the lesson, we can talk about the students sharing with partners and responding as a pair with their clicker. Then we can plan the "Whole Group

***"Sitting and planning with teachers using the Model of Effective Coaching during the Before coaching session provides an opportunity to talk about what strategy a teacher might use to assess learning."***

Mini Lesson Lecture" and discuss appropriate strategies to formatively assess the mini lesson with red cards and green cards ending with an exit slip in order to gain information to adjust the next day's lesson as needed.

All of the planning and implementation for the formative assessments provides wonderful talking points for our *After* conversation. Did our plan work? Did

we gain the knowledge that we need in order to assess the student learning? As Carol Ann Tomlinson states in *The Bridge Between Today's Lesson and Tomorrow's*, "Formative assessment should permeate a class period. A great teacher is a habitual student of his or her students. A keen observer, the teacher is constantly watching what students do, looking for clues about their learning progress, and asking for input from students about their status." However, without the skill set to know how to formatively assess and adjust the course of a lesson or an individual learner's mind set, a teacher's craft is nothing more than a mixed bowl of melted

brown ice-cream swirled with colors of what was meant to be. Through the support of a coach, a teacher can learn how to appropriately use formative assessments building both coaching and teaching practices.

For more information, please contact: Lee Ann Miller, lee\_miller@sharonsd.org

# A Formative Walk through the Four Quadrants

By Adriana Coppola, Lena Wasylyk, Sylvie de Bourmont, and Liz Meehan, Randolph Township SD Instructional Coaches

## One-on-One and Small Group Support

The heart of instructional coaching beats to the power of the one-on-one **Before-During-After (BDA)** cycle. Throughout this influential cycle, coaches are able to support educators and affect practice. One of the most important points to consider as an instructional coach is formative assessment because it leads to reflection and growth. Dylan Wiliam outlined 5 key formative assessment practices to improve student learning and all 5 can be applied to instructional coaching. These practices are both relevant and vital and can be used during the **BDA** cycle.

- Clarifying, sharing, and understanding learning intentions and criteria for success.
- Engineering effective classroom discussions, activities, and learning tasks that elicit evidence of learning.
- Providing feedback that moves learning forward.
- Activating learners [teachers] as instructional resources for one another.
- Activating learners [teachers] as owners of their own learning.

(Embedded Formative Assessment)

## Collecting and Using Data

Determining whether an assessment is formative depends on how collected data is used. Instructional coaches and teachers will base their strategies and next steps in relationships with where their students or colleagues stand. Data is routinely collected from the interactions that an instructional coach has throughout the day. Data collection includes teacher attendance of in-house PD, teacher reflections post-PD, student data collected by teachers, and the data that is tracked throughout the **BDA** cycle. The formative assessment aspect of data is reflected in the adjustments made to instructional practice after analysis and reflection.

## Using Evidence-Based Literacy Practices

Formative assessment researchers often refer to the FAR cycle (Formative Assessment for Results). Instructional coaches throughout can use FAR to help teachers plan-teach-reflect (or **BDA**). This will help highlight formative assessments every step of the way so teachers are planning for how to communicate clear learning targets to students all along with success criteria. The coach-teacher collaboration can make learning visible and concrete, allowing students to reach a level of awareness about what they are learning. Educators should keep in mind that when students are self-aware, their brain is working at its highest level.

Love, N., Smith, N., & Witacre, R. (2015, December 7). *Coaching Teams to Use Formative Assessment for Results*. Research for Better Teaching. Lecture presented at Learning Forward 2015 Annual Conference, Washington, D.C.

## Reflective and Non-Evaluative Practice

Above all, instructional coaching must be non-evaluative in order to be successful. It is important to use information obtained in one-on-one meetings, and through comprehensive research in order to inform your practice as a coach. However, the most valuable information is that which is obtained through the **BDA** cycle. As teachers convey their needs, our opportunity for formative assessment is presented. Offering real time, non-evaluative feedback and data ensures a safe, confidential environment in which to experiment with technique and the confidence to take chances. Engaging in every part of this process allows for reflection both on the teacher and coach's part, leading to a more intensive coaching experience about both instructional delivery and student achievement.

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