



## Rethinking Classroom Assessment

*In looking through our archives of newsletters, we were struck by how relevant many of our previous lead articles still are. We decided that once a year we will recycle an "oldie-but-goodie". For this newsletter, we selected this highly relevant article from October 2011 by **former Special Education School Improvement Specialist, Krista Promnitz**, that reminds us of the power and purpose of formative assessments.*

I walked into my Coordinator's office to plan my professional development and she asked me, "What do you think you need to learn more about?" Despite the simplicity of the question, a quick answer was not at the ready. After some thought, I said I would like to know more about how classroom teachers use assessments. I have a background in standardized assessments, but the day-to-day assessment practices of a typical teacher were outside my experience.

As we talked, I decided to focus my year-long research project on the concept of formative assessment. I found *Transformative Assessment* by W. James Popham (2008). Several principals I visited said they owned the book, but had not read it. One told me that if I thought it was worth the time, she would read it but that if it was another book with the same worn-out information it would stay on the shelf. So, here's a brief review of the ideas in the book



that are helping to form my thinking on this complex topic.

In *Transformative Assessment*, Popham describes a multi-tiered approach to engaging students and faculty in daily assessments that are used to guide teaching and learning. He defines formative assessment as a process "used by teachers and students during instruction that provides feedback to adjust ongoing teaching and learning to improve students' achievement of intended instructional outcomes" (p. 5). Popham goes on to point out that

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# School Tools: More on Formative Assessment

Krista was not the only RSE-TASC specialist to focus on what research and best practices have to say about classroom formative assessments. In the February 2013 [RSE-TASC Reporter](#), then SESIS Martha Trujillo-Torp also took on this critically important topic. Dr. Torp shared what she had learned both from providing classroom-embedded coaching for teachers and from the book, *Advancing Formative Assessment in Every Classroom*, by Moss & Brookhart. Read this informative article at <https://rsetasc.pnwbores.org/feb-2013-formative-assessment/>.

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formative assessment is a collaborative process that occurs during instruction, not outside or as an end result of instruction.

According to Popham, there are four levels of formative assessment:

- ⇒ **Level 1: Teachers' Instructional Adjustments:** Teachers collect evidence by which they decide whether to adjust their current or immediately-upcoming instruction in order to improve the effectiveness of that instruction.
- ⇒ **Level 2: Students' Learning Tactics Adjustments:** Students use evidence of their current skills-and-knowledge status to decide whether to adjust the procedures they are using in an effort to learn something.
- ⇒ **Level 3: Classroom Climate Shift:** Teachers consistently apply formative assessment to the degree that its use transforms a traditional, comparison-dominated classroom, where the main purpose of assessment is to assign grades, into an atypical, learning-dominated classroom, where the main purpose of assessment is to improve the quality of teaching and learning.

⇒ **Level 4: Schoolwide Implementation:** An entire school (or district) adopts one or more levels of formative assessment, chiefly through the use of professional development and teacher learning communities.

There are many ways to collect this information, but according to Popham and other leading researchers on the topic, formative assessment results are not part of a student's grades. This is a major shift in thinking and it may present challenges with respect to classroom and school culture. Popham provides multiple strategies for addressing this culture shift in his Level 3 discussion, including a sample survey to be completed by the students (pgs. 106-107).

As I work on this book review, I am reflecting on a conference session that I attended this morning with Dr. Douglas Reeves (respected Harvard researcher and author) where he addressed the essential nature of using formative assessments to improve student achievement. He discussed extensively the need to provide professional development to teachers and

administrators on sustainable change through good practice, not purchased products. Specifically, he referenced the concept of formative assessment as a way to intervene early in the learning process for struggling students. Dr. Reeves also spoke on the need to create student accountability and a sense of ownership over their learning processes. His lecture was fascinating and current. A participant asked him for a book recommendation that addressed these topics and his response was "*Transformative Assessment*" by W. James Popham. If this book is sitting on your shelf, I encourage you to pick it up, dust it off and read it." I second his recommendation. It just may change the way you and your teaching faculty think of classroom assessments.

## **Reference**

Popham, W.J. (2011)  
*Transformative assessment in action: An inside look at applying the process.*  
Alexandria, VA: ASCD.



# Come Learn with us at our upcoming Regional Trainings

## Individualized Educational Planning & the CSE Process

### December

- Testing Accommodations, 12/5  
\*Wait List\*

### January

- Testing Accommodations, 1/3
- New CSE/CPSE Chairperson Training (3-Day), 1/16, 1/25 & 1/30 \*Wait List\*
- Improving IEP Development (2-Day), 1/31 & 2/6

### February

- Testing Accommodations, 2/1

## Behavior & Discipline Supports

### December

- PBIS Essential Elements: Tier 1 Supports, 12/11
- Team Implementation Guidance, 12/13

### January

- PBIS Booster: Data-Based Decision Making (2-Day), 1/9 & 2/28
- FBA-BIP: Tier 3 Behavioral Interventions (3-Day), 1/15, 2/5 & 3/7 \*Wait List\*
- Team Implementation Guidance, 1/16

### February

- Team Implementation Guidance, 2/14

## Leadership

### December

- CSE Roundtable, 12/3 \*Wait List\*
- CPSE Colloquium, 12/17

### January

- What Principals Need to Know: Testing Accommodations, 1/8

### February

- CSE Roundtable, 2/7 \*Wait List\*
- CPSE Colloquium, 2/13

## Transition Systems

### December

- WE-CAN (Westchester Educators and Community Agencies Network), 12/6
- The Forum: Adult Agencies that Serve Individuals with Multiple Disabilities, 12/10
- Diploma & Credential Options for Students with Disabilities, 12/12
- Putnam County Transition Consortium, 12/13
- Early Bird Special: Superintendent's Determination for a Local Diploma, 12/19

### January

- WE-CAN (Westchester Educators and Community Agencies Network), 1/3
- Putnam County Transition Consortium, 1/10
- Transition Specialist Network, 1/15
- Diploma and Credential Options for Students with Disabilities, 1/28

### February

- WE-CAN (Westchester Educators and Community Agencies Network), 2/7
- Putnam County Transition Consortium, 2/14
- Transition Specialist Network, 2/28

**View the RSE-TASC  
Training Calendar and Register  
at  
[rsetasc.pnwbores.org/events/](https://rsetasc.pnwbores.org/events/)**



## Community Events

### PNW BOCES

[www.pnwbores.org/catalog](https://www.pnwbores.org/catalog)

- Who's Doing The Work? How to Say Less so Readers Can Do More: featuring Jan Burkins, begins 12/10

### Rockland BOCES

[www.rocklandbores.org](https://www.rocklandbores.org)

- Transition Workshop Series, 12/5 [dkitz@rboces.org](mailto:dkitz@rboces.org)
- Secondary ELA & SS Collaborative: Common Practices for Close Reading & Writing—Two Part Series, begins 12/5
- Youth Connections Orientation, 12/17

### SW BOCES

[www.swbores.org](https://www.swbores.org)

- iPads for Special Ed, 12/3
- The Ins and Outs of Differentiated Instruction—ELA, 12/4
- Regional Mental Health Forum, 12/12

### Westchester Institute for

### Human Development

<https://www.wiwd.org/events>

- Transitioning From CPSE to CSE: A Workshop for Parents, 12/5
- Developing Measurable Goals and Measuring Student Progress, 12/11
- CPSE/CSE Parent Member Training, 12/12
- New Special Education Regulations and Updates, 12/14



# BRIGHT SPOTS!

Our Bright Spot this month comes from two schools with very diverse student populations. Math teachers from Croton-Harmon High School and K-12 teachers from the Rising Ground school for students struggling with emotional and learning challenges were among those who attended a two-day training on Explicit Direct Instruction (EDI) with RSE-TASC Regional Trainer Ann Narcisse this fall.

**What were students with disabilities able to achieve?** Students:

- \* Successfully solved complex mathematics problems that had previously proved challenging
- \* Increased time on task and frequency of responses
- \* Showed higher levels of enthusiasm and persistence
- \* Actively engaged in teaching content to each other
- \* Increased and extended written responses
- \* Increased class participation and appropriate classroom behaviors
- \* Increased both quantity and quality of contributions to classroom discussions

**What practices or systems made this possible?** Teachers at both settings reported that these outcomes resulted directly from their implementation of EDI strategies. These included:

- ◇ Using a greater variety of processing activities including Paired Verbal Fluency, Elbow Partners and Pair-Share
- ◇ Consciously building in frequent "opportunities to respond" through use of non-volunteers, white boards and whole class responding through Read With Me and Choral Responding
- ◇ Building in think-time through use of I-Time and wait time
- ◇ Frequently Checking For Understanding (CFU)

**What can we learn from this?** The evidence-based practices built into the EDI framework are effective for all students, K to 12, with and without learning challenges. Also, developing and implementing consistent evidence-based instructional practices school-wide powerfully impacts student outcomes. As one high school math teacher described the impact of the training this way: "Most math teachers at the high school took this workshop and now we have a common language and practice!"

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