Challenges in Formative Assessment

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What is Formative Assessment?

- Activities which result in information that can be used to alter teaching and learning
- Assessment 'becomes formative when the information is used to adapt teaching and learning to meet student needs'

  Carol Boston, 'The concept of formative assessment', *Practical Assessment, Research and Evaluation* 8:9 (2002).

- A tool to improve student performance
- A tool to enhance student learning
- A tool to help tutors!

Formative Assessment

- Formative assessment enables ...
- **Students** and **tutors** to **gauge the standard** of written work
- **Students** to **improve performance**

- Formative assessment and feedback constitute a **two-way** process between students and tutors
- It can be written comments, annotation on essays, essay return tutorials, any time a student asks a question about work and a tutor responds

- It should relate to the **marking criteria**, be **full**, indicate areas of **good performance**, identify **problems**, and suggest **improvements**

A **Two-Way** Process

- 'It is the **student's responsibility** to make the most of **all opportunities** provided through **constructive feedback** to improve their **work and performance**'

The Project

- **To find out …**
- **What are the limitations of and possibilities for formative assessment?**
- **How can we improve formative assessment?**

The Project

- Started by …
- Circulating statements on current practice in our Schools
- Comparing and contrasting practice in Schools with QAA benchmarks, and across Schools
- Investigating student attitudes/ responses to formative assessment through questionnaires and responses to the National Student Survey
- Comparing advantages and disadvantages
- Formulating principles to guide formative assessment in different disciplines/Schools
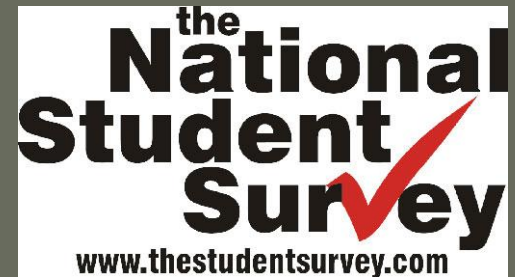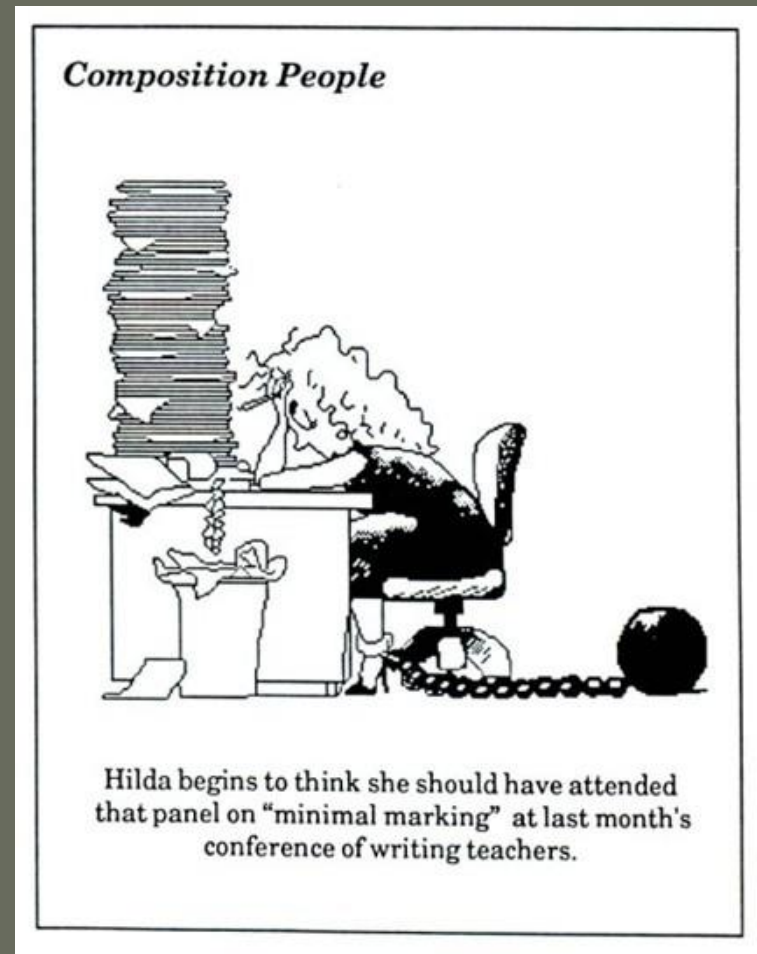
Student Questionnaire

- Designed to measure:

- Whether students would prefer more or less formative assignments

- What students believed to be the purpose of formative assignments, and how they had used feedback on formative assignments to improve performance;

- What type of feedback students had previously received on formative assignments, and what type of feedback they would prefer in future

- Also designed to encourage students to critically appraise the purpose of formative assessment and feedback

Problems of Formative Assessment

- Large groups – too much marking!

- Types of assessment – student perception of 'fit' versus ability of tutor to mark

- When should formative assignments be set? – time for learning versus time for marking

- Should formative assignments be compulsory? – student perceptions (over-assessment/worth)

Composition People

Hilda begins to think she should have attended that panel on "minimal marking" at last month's conference of writing teachers.

http://wac.colostate.edu/atd/articles/haswell2.jpg

Student Expectations and Responses

- Mixed levels of satisfaction with level of formative assessment across Schools
- Most identified purpose as 'practice', monitoring progress, or 'getting feedback' (!)
- Most believed useful as practice (plus improved focus and discipline)
- Most would like written and oral feedback (was this the wrong question?)
- Students had used feedback to improve performance in a variety of ways

Preliminary conclusions …?

- Students use formative assessment in a variety of ways

- This often depends on type of assessment and feedback received

- But most find it useful

- The student-centred approach works!
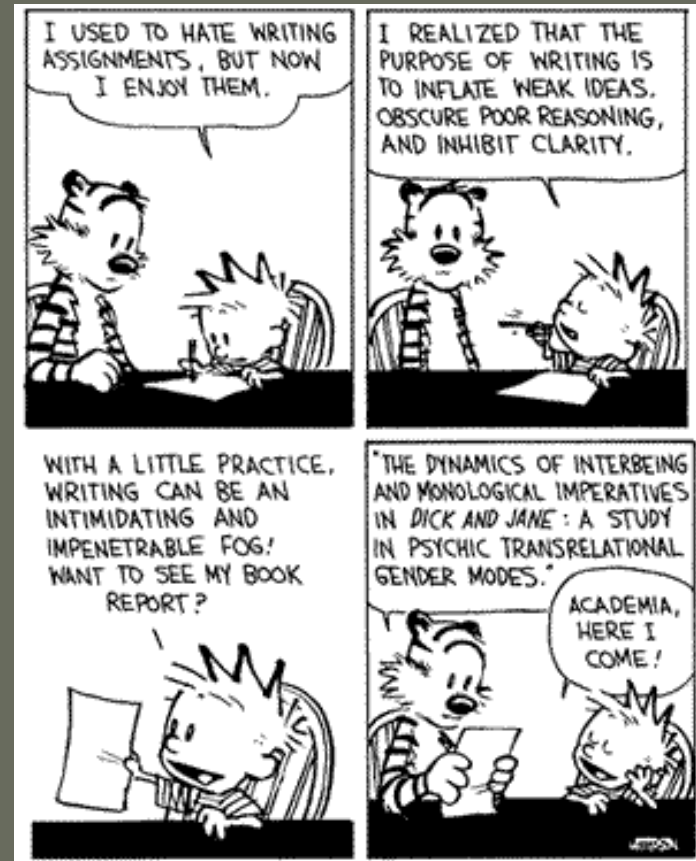
Case study: mid-term project week

Formative assessment week (November)

All students participate

Various types of assessment, including:

- Study skills training
- Course revision and briefing sessions
- Poster presentations to staff
- Self-evaluation
- Peer evaluation

Overall Findings

- Isolation of eight principles to guide design of formative assessment:

1) Size of groups
2) Timing of formative assessment
3) Managing student expectations
4) Anticipating learning styles
5) Types of formative assessment
6) Requirements and incentives
7) Method and use of feedback
8) Measuring outcomes

So what?

- Implementation:

- Engagement with students via questionnaires and staff-student panels
- Informal discussion with colleagues
- Discussion at working parties, section meetings and Boards of Studies