Implementing formative assessment in my teaching or testing context

I work for public schools and our Ministry of Education, the last couple of years, recognizing the importance of formative assessment in teaching and learning, has been encouraging teachers to use it during their teaching process. The embedding of formative assessment in our everyday teaching is necessary since the ministry's slogan for this year has been "We teach the students not the book or the material". This moves the focus of our teaching on our students and their needs, interests, learning styles, multiple intelligences and prior knowledge.

All of the above are achieved via differentiated teaching which can be implemented in our teaching context with the help of formative assessment mainly. This will give us, as teachers, feedback on our students' performance. Then with modifying our material and adjusting our teaching methods we can motivate our students, suit their unique needs and support their weaknesses.

To implement formative assessment in my teaching context I use **oral questions or discussions** to understand my students understanding and then give them extra help to help them overcome any problems they may have. I try to ask critical thinking questions like analyzing, comparing and contrasting ideas/texts, and to personalize the material I have taught them. One disadvantage of this form of formative assessment is that it is time-consuming, especially in big classes, and sometimes some students, who are shy or lazy, may avoid giving me feedback. To overcome this problem I use a variety of formative assessment methods such as **exit slips,** for the students to record what they have learnt and how they feel about it, or graphic organizers such as the **K-W-L charts** (what a student knows, wants to know, and has learnt) or the **Venn diagram,** to compare and contrast ideas. In addition, I use **peer assessment sheets**, with an evaluation scale, for students to use when working in groups or self-assessment **check-lists** or **'can do' cards** at the end of a presentation or a unit/lesson respectively.

Sometimes I ask my students to do **projects,** so they apply and expand the new knowledge, but such activities must be carefully planned and specific guidelines must be given to the students. There is the risk that students just copy information from the Internet or use somebody else's work. The main problem with this kind of activity is that sometimes it's difficult to know whether the work done, belongs to the student or to somebody else.

It seems, after all, that the biggest disadvantage of formative assessment is the increased work load on the part of the teacher who has to prepare for it, monitor the students and collect feedback from them. She/he, also, has to offer remedial work or adjust the book/material to his/her students, as well as, help them overcome any problems they face. This disadvantage is outweighed by the fact that formative assessment is worthwhile as it can guide our instruction and promote learning. It can help both our students and us to develop and makes learning and teaching effective and successful!

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