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Book Review: Achieving student growth--The powerful IMPACT of Micro-feedback Formative Assessment

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Book Review

Greenleaf, R. K. (2014). *Achieving student growth: The powerful IMPACT of micro-feedback formative assessment*. Newfield, ME: Greenleaf Papanek Publications. 166 pages.

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Introduction

It was quite a positive experience in reviewing *Achieving Student Growth: The Powerful IMPACT of Micro-feedback Formative Assessment*. The author of this textbook is Dr. Robert K. Greenleaf, an educational researcher in the areas of learning, instruction, and achievement. Greenleaf encourages educators to not only understand the “raw scores” of their students’ performance, but to also comprehend “where the students are” and “why the students are there.” Greenleaf introduces an innovative process called *micro-feedback formative assessment* (MFA),

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to challenge the notion that common approaches to instruction and assessment can be better used by focusing on “live” data and using the data to drive the instruction in real time through a set of comprehensive steps. Clearly, Greenleaf’s textbook of the MFA process contributes to the field of student achievement by adding knowledge, tools to implement, and resources for teachers and administrators. The purpose of the book’s theme is restated throughout each chapter, and chapter two provides a clear overview of each chapter’s goal.

Structure and Summary

The textbook is organized into a preface section, seven chapters, and a variety of appendices. In the preface, the author describes the results of implementing the MFA process and reviews the progressions of this tool. The author’s comments in chapter two provide an overview of MFA and a step-by-step approach on how to use the book. Greenleaf states:

... micro-feedback formative assessment is a very short cycle process of generating specific, targeted feedback for both teacher and student use in addressing immediate learning needs. It provides clearly linked information informing instructional strategy choices as well as to direct student attention toward key learning components. (p.21)

More importantly, the content of the book provides readers with a context of the importance of MFA and how it is needed for better student achievement.

While chapter two focuses on the MFA process, chapter three details the various “non-negotiable” components for achieving impact. The author lists six areas that should always be addressed with MFA. Educators can take away that the Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are integral and must meet regularly, and that common assessments must be held to better understand patterns of difficulty in understanding “essential” standards. Using a more personal approach, the author provides three easy ways to starting MFAs. Greenleaf mentions in chapter five the essence of monitoring the implementation of MFAs. He states:

Monitoring implementation will yield far more impact on student learning outcomes than monitoring student outcomes alone. Outcomes have already happened. If we want to influence the outcomes (short- or long-term) then we must continually focus on how the path we are taking is influencing learning along the way. (p. ?)

In short, the author stresses the importance of implementing MFA with fidelity and encourages a straightforward, easy-to-read guide on how to implement MFA to be present at each department PLC meeting.

My favorite part of the book includes examples provided in chapter six. Readers will truly grasp how MFA works overall and how to implement it in their classrooms. In particular, the author provides well thought out illustrations of a student’s baseline and how he or she improved based on a variety of formative assessments—data driven instruction. Finally, the author concludes with an overview of the importance of impacting student learning by using the MFA process of unpacking standards and problem areas, meeting with PLC groups, and guiding instruction based on assessment.

Positive Attributes

Greenleaf provides an excellent overview chapter that is not too detailed in subject matter, but serves the public’s interest in understanding the need and content of micro-feedback assessments. In general, I liked how the author explains that currently teachers are inundated with several tests and sometimes assignments with no real purpose, whereas they should use approaches like the MFA process to develop their PLCs. Developing these “communities” will their colleagues and student achievement because the groups will be focused on understanding the “why” and then collaboratively solving the problem.

Another beneficial attribute from this book is that Greenleaf uses a myriad of primary sources from actual case studies to point out the reasons for educational change in the K-12 system as well as traits of successful schools, such as schools with PLCs. Primary research is beneficial to educators because it can demonstrate firsthand the experiences of participants as well as help provide more depth into the study. The book also contains a set of descriptive statistics such as a variety of graphs, tables, and charts which the author uses to emphasize the importance of MFA. Finally, the author’s ability to provide this book in a compact manner with strategies on initiating

MFA is also useful. Teachers are swamped with so many staff meetings and assessment textbooks, but this book's overall compactness and to the point on how best to use assessment data can be a refresher to educators and novice ones. For instance, the author's comments about common assessments reminded me of the importance of these types of tests to determine any patterns of difficulties shared by students with different teachers.

Negative Attributes

While Greenleaf provides a thorough explanation of the MFA process, I would encourage more discussion points throughout each chapter and possible journal questions at the beginning of each chapter. College education professors may want to adopt this textbook to teach beginning teachers the intricacies of student achievement. As a result, having a variety of discussion topics for students to gather in groups and discuss would be helpful and will ultimately put "cooperative learning" into practice. Likewise, writing exercises to practice various concepts from the book would also be encouraged. As most educators know, students who interact with their readings, whether through writing or discussion, tend to better comprehend those concepts at a higher level as well as transfer knowledge to long-term memory. On a different note, placing questions at the beginning of each chapter that provide opportunities to journal can also be helpful because students can connect to prior knowledge and ultimately better understand the text. With that stated, this additional feature of journaling can possibly be included in a second edition, if the author so chooses.

Recommendations and Conclusion

While there are a plethora of assessment textbooks, this book is recommended for its practical approach and emphasis on student growth. Readers can view this textbook as an easy guide to learning information about MFA and how best to use the process in the classroom. It can serve as a quick, easy resource for teachers and administrators. Now more than ever, teachers are being held responsible for their students' test scores, and a book that focuses on student growth is essential to any educator (Greenleaf, 2014).

The author explains some of the non-negotiable tools that teachers should use in order to impact student achievement and conduct MFA with fidelity. Teachers who may want to recap some of these strategies can remember the following to help guide instruction and MFA assessments:

1. Focus
2. Student work at the core
3. Effective feedback
4. PLC essentials
5. Common assessments
6. Common instructional strategy exploration and verification

Administrators are held accountable for student achievement (Greenleaf, 2014). As a result, this book provides the essential traits of successful schools who implement the MFA process. Additionally, Greenleaf places an emphasis on assessment and student growth which is considered to be a central theme in today's educational reform. Education critics have measured

a school's performance based on student performance and academic progress on standardized testing. This book is crucial for educators to know and for the community to understand so as to focus on encouraging assessment techniques, such as MFA, and better achieve higher student test scores.

One final recommendation, if any, would be to encourage the author and publisher to collaborate with school districts in providing this book as a professional development resource. Moreover, to further administrators' and teacher leaders' understanding of what impacts student achievement, such as the MFA process, they should purchase, interact with, and review the contents of the book at their regular staff development meetings.

Dr. Yxstian Gutierrez earned his Doctorate degree in Special Education at the age of 27. He has taught elementary, middle, and high school to students with special needs. Dr. Gutierrez also has extensive experience in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and has facilitated PLC trainings. In addition to his full-time teaching experience as a Resource Specialist Teacher, Dr. Gutierrez teaches at Moreno Valley College as an adjunct professor and serves as the Councilman of District 4 for the City of Moreno Valley.

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