

Early Career Framework

Core Induction Programme

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Week

1: Fundamental principles of effective assessment (1)

Session Elements

- discuss with a colleague
- practical exercise
- independent planning

Learning Intentions for this session

You will learn that:

6.1 Effective assessment is critical to teaching because it provides teachers with information about pupils' understanding and needs.

You will learn how to:

Avoid common assessment pitfalls, by:

You will learn how to:

6a. Planning formative assessment tasks linked to lesson objectives and thinking ahead about what would indicate understanding (e.g. by using hinge questions to pinpoint knowledge gaps).

6b. Drawing conclusions about what pupils have learned by looking at patterns of performance over a number of assessments (e.g. appreciating that assessments draw inferences about learning from performance).

Introduction

In this self-study session, you will extend your knowledge of the fundamental principles of assessment. You will speak to a colleague about the different ways that they use assessment in their practice. You will then consider the learning objectives for a forthcoming lesson and select three different age-appropriate assessment strategies, evaluating their effectiveness. This activity will be supported further during your subsequent mentor meeting.

In your ECT mentor meeting this week, you will discuss and complete the Module 4 self-assessment audit to identify what you already know about effective teaching (learn that) and the skills you are developing as a teacher (learn how to). You and your mentor will use the outcome of the audit to inform your use of materials in this module. You will return to the audit as you work through Module 4, using it to chart your progress.

Research and Practice Summary

This reading will help you understand some of the theory behind this week's topic. We will start by introducing some of the key concepts (these are in bold). You will also see some suggestions of how to put these concepts into practice. **When using these concepts in your own practice, you will need to take account of your pupils' characteristics, the context of your classroom and the nature of the material that you are teaching.**

Questioning for assessment in a Year 11 history lesson

Seda wants to introduce a topic on the Puritan Threat, part of a unit on Elizabethan England. Pupils have already studied the Religious

Settlement and Catholic Threat, so they have some knowledge of the Puritans. Seda is keen to identify any misconceptions pupils have acquired in order to plan the subsequent lessons to correct them. She's taught this topic before and knows that pupils typically struggle with some of the core ideas underpinning the topic.

What could Seda do to check her pupils' existing understanding of these core ideas at the start of the topic?

Assessment is a broad term, covering a wide range of teaching and learning activity. 'Assessment of learning' (or summative assessment), used after a period of teaching/learning, aims to find out what pupils know or can do at a given point in time. 'Assessment for learning' (or formative assessment), used during a period of teaching/learning, aims to find out where pupils are now and where they need to go next, as well as to provide feedback on how to get there. Assessment may also be used to establish pupils' prior knowledge and understanding at the outset of a sequence of learning. With these different purposes come different methods of assessment. Assessment can add significantly to a teacher's workload, so it is important to become familiar with your school's expectations and to learn efficient methods from colleagues.

Peer-assessment and self-assessment can be valuable tools that enable pupils to check their own progress against agreed success criteria. However, pupils first need to be trained in how to do this well, and the approaches work best alongside teacher assessment rather than as an alternative. These approaches are explored further in week 4 of this module.

Formative assessment (or assessment for learning) is assessment which is used to directly inform the teaching and learning process – i.e. when evidence gathered on pupils is used to make adaptations to teaching and learning. Dylan William describes it in terms of how 'teachers and learners use information about student achievement to make adjustments to the student's learning that improve their achievement.'

To support pupil learning through effective formative assessment, you could draw on five key strategies for embedding formative assessment, outlined by Dylan William, which are:

- clarifying, understanding and sharing learning intentions (e.g. by sharing clear success criteria for pupils at the outset of learning activities by using a checklist or by modelling 'what a good one looks like')
- engineering effective classroom discussions, tasks and activities that elicit evidence of learning (e.g. by regularly using questioning and other ways of

gathering information on pupil learning throughout and across lessons – this could include: quizzes, observing pupils as they work independently or discuss ideas with peers, checking pupils' work during lesson time to monitor their progress, structured class discussions)

- providing feedback that moves learners forward (e.g. by being explicit about what pupils should do next to improve their learning)
- activating students as learning resources for one another (e.g. by explicitly teaching strategies such as peer-assessment)
- activating students as owners of their own learning (e.g. by explicitly teaching pupils strategies to monitor and regulate their own learning)

Seda could use these strategies with her class by planning some activities at the beginning of the topic which encourage pupils to share their current understanding about the core ideas. This would give her the information she needs to plan the rest of the topic. She could devise a few diagnostic questions and use whole-class response techniques to gather responses from all pupils. Pupils could respond by:

- writing short answers (up to a sentence) on a mini-whiteboard and holding these up so the teacher can see all answers at once
- using their fingers to respond to a multiple-choice question with numbered optional responses (i.e. if they think the answer is option 1, they hold up 1 finger; if option 4, 4 fingers)

Before collecting answers from pupils, Seda could give them a chance to discuss their ideas in small groups or with talk partners. This gives pupils a chance to share their thinking in a low-stakes environment and build confidence before sharing their answers with the whole class.

Summative assessment sums up, at a given time (for example, the end of a unit), where learners are in their learning. It is also referred to as 'assessment of learning', in contrast to 'assessment for learning'. Summative assessments are often more useful and reliable when compared against an external benchmark and conducted in controlled conditions. This should improve the reliability of the information that the teacher gets from the assessment.

It can be helpful to schedule your summative assessment a little before the end of the time available for teaching a given topic (e.g. in week 4 of a 5-week topic). This allows time (e.g. in week 5) for you and your pupils to address any learning needs picked up in the assessment by revisiting content that pupils have learned less well.

To help you make effective summative assessments, you could:

- use externally validated materials where possible, such as a previous national test paper and mark scheme
- if several classes in one year group are to take the same summative assessment
 - give all the pupils the same notice and chance to prepare, so that you can compare across groups more accurately
 - work with your colleagues to plan the assessment, minimising excessive workload for individuals

Questioning is one way that teachers can check pupils' prior knowledge and understanding and identify misconceptions or gaps in knowledge. Questions also have other purposes, as explored in Module 3.

Questions can be structured in different ways according to their purpose. Multiple-choice questions are useful for identifying common misconceptions and determining whether pupils can 'recognise' correct answers – a helpful stepping stone toward their being able to retrieve or recall information in the absence of retrieval cues. However, writing successful multiple-choice questions is complex if they are to be of most impact in both developing and assessing pupil learning. Hinge questions are a particular type of multiple-choice question that help teachers check whether pupils have understood important information that has to be mastered before moving on to the next part of the learning sequence. Hinge questions will be explored further in week 3 of Module 4.

To use questions to support the accurate and productive use of assessment, you could:

- use multiple-choice questions to identify knowledge gaps and misconceptions during lessons (a good source of well-constructed multiple-choice questions can be past examination papers, if these are available in your phase and specialism)
- prompt pupils to elaborate when responding to questioning to check that correct answers stem from secure understanding (e.g. 'tell me how you reached that answer', 'what tells you that this is the correct answer?' or 'can you explain to me why this answer is incorrect?')

High-quality multiple-choice questions make use of all options to tell the teacher something about pupils' understanding:

- there can be one correct answer or more than one
- the incorrect answers, or 'distractors', are linked to common errors or misunderstandings – the design of these incorrect answers should be approached as carefully as the design of the correct answer(s)

By noting which incorrect answers pupils give, teachers can learn more about the misunderstandings that pupils hold. This helps the teacher to decide what to do next in their teaching.

In Seda's case, she could use her knowledge of the typical errors that pupils have made when she taught this topic previously to help her to write a usefully diagnostic question, or questions, to frame her initial assessment of pupils' understanding.

Performance is used to describe 'what a pupil can do at a given moment.' How well they do in a test, for example, can be described as their performance. Teachers draw inferences about what pupils have learned by looking at their performance in assessments. Externally validated assessment instruments – exams and standardised tests – are useful for determining a pupil's current level of performance within a particular domain. However, there are disadvantages to the use of high-stakes tests, since a single point of assessment (performance) is, by definition, not a reliable measure of what a pupil has really learned. It is therefore more valid and reliable to draw conclusions about what pupils have learned by looking at patterns of performance over a number of assessments. You will explore this idea further in the ECT training session for this module.

What did Seda do? The principles of assessment in practice

Seda decides to write several multiple-choice questions as a starter activity, with common misconceptions built into the distractors (wrong answers). Pupils quickly tackle the questions. Seda asks them to then discuss and justify their answers with their talk partners – talk partners are set by the seating plan and have been arranged taking account of pupils' prior attainment, behaviour for learning and personalities. She circulates the room to listen to discussions, noting where pupils have strong understanding in some cases and important misconceptions in others.

Seda selects some pairs to explain their answers to each question and the reasoning behind these answers. She uses further questioning and discussion to encourage pupils to expand on their answers and to highlight and correct the misconceptions she noted previously in relation to Puritan beliefs and roles in Elizabethan society.

Seda was aware of the typical confusion pupils experience in differentiating religious groups in Elizabethan England; she knew that identifying and clarifying those misconceptions was essential to pupils understanding the new topic. Using multiple-choice questioning with

deliberate distractors allowed her to quickly identify her pupils' prior knowledge and misconceptions so that these could be addressed before they interfered with the new topic. She wanted pupils to justify their answers to the multiple-choice questions in order to better understand why some may have confused their thinking and to reassure herself that others' correct answers were built on secure knowledge. Doing this in talk partners gave less-confident pupils the opportunity to check understanding in a low-stakes way and the teacher the chance to monitor this. As a result of this lesson, Seda was able to better organise future lessons. In this case, she decided to incorporate some quizzes and concept-matching starter activities throughout the lesson sequence to revise the Puritans' basic beliefs and to help her give more tailored support for those who needed the content further broken down.

Self-Study Activities

Review: 10 mins

Read the Research and Practice Summary on this week's topic. As you read, reflect on:

1. the practices that you are already doing well
2. the practices you are doing some of the time but could do more of/more consistently
3. the practices you do not use in your teaching yet

As you work through the activities in this week's self-directed study session and mentor meeting, aim to both refine and extend what you already do well and to build your skill and confidence in using practices which are not yet a regular part of your teaching repertoire.

Plan: 10 mins

Discuss with a colleague

Arrange to speak to an experienced colleague about how they use assessment in their practice.

Look for connections between the outcomes from this discussion and the research summary above. Make notes as appropriate in your Learning Log, if you are using one.

You could ask them:

- how they use formative assessment at the start of a topic to find out what pupils know already
- how they use formative assessment during a topic to monitor pupils' progression
- how they use summative assessment at the end of a topic to make judgements about learning
- the factors they consider when selecting a formative or summative assessment tool to use in their teaching

If you are not able to speak to a colleague with the required expertise, you can refer to the video resources that accompany this session.

Theory to Practice: 20 mins

Practical exercise / independent planning

Select a lesson that you will be teaching soon. Look at the learning objectives (LOs) for this lesson and identify three different ways that you could assess pupils' learning in relation to these LOs (for example: different types of questions, observation, quizzing, peer-assessment task, self-assessment task, marking work).

Using the concepts in this week's Research and Practice Summary and other knowledge that you have in this area, reflect on each of your chosen three options by completing the table below. Put an * by the strategy that you think is the most effective strategy for this lesson, based on your assessment. The first row is an example of how Seda might complete the table for her topic about the Puritan threat.

Identify assessment strategy. Outline how you could use this assessment strategy within your chosen lesson/session.

Why have you chosen this strategy? What are the strengths of this approach in this lesson and with these pupils?

What will you learn about pupils' understanding/skills from this assessment?

Identify assessment strategy. Outline how you could use this assessment strategy within your chosen lesson/session.

I could...use multiple-choice questions which include common misunderstandings as the distractors. I will do this at the beginning of the topic. I'll give pupils time to discuss their answers in talk pairs so I can listen in and assess their understanding. I'll then use whole-class response with mini-whiteboards and targeted questioning for elaboration.

Why have you chosen this strategy? What are the strengths of this approach in this lesson and with these pupils?

I have chosen this approach because... I can make the questions tightly focused on the key aspects of Puritan ideas, which pupils often confuse with moderate Protestant or Catholic beliefs. My pupils enjoy discussions, so this suits them, and it suits me because it generates lots of talk for me to assess. I'll need questioning so I can really probe understanding.

What will you learn about pupils' understanding/skills from this assessment?

This will help me to find out... how far students have understood the key features of Puritan beliefs and if they can differentiate them from moderate Protestant and Catholic beliefs. I can then plan how far I need to teach or reinforce this crucial content before students can begin to assess the threat posed by the Puritans to Elizabeth's rule.

Next Steps: 5 mins

Bring your completed table and any supporting notes to your mentor meeting next week (this week, you will focus on the module audit). Be ready to discuss this activity with your mentor. You should also bring any outcomes recorded in your Learning Log from your discussion with a colleague and be prepared to discuss how you have developed your knowledge and understanding in relation to the learning intentions from this self-directed study session.

[Next Week — 3: Applying good assessment practice in the classroom](#) 

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