

Teacher vignette

Formative assessment

Teacher vignettes are short stories from practitioners about how they use an evidence-based practice in their classroom. The reflection questions at the end are designed to encourage your thinking about how you could adapt aspects of the practice into your own setting.

Lesson context

This teaching vignette comes from a Year 7 English class. I ran a formative assessment task to gather some data about my students' writing skills and how they interpret texts. I wanted to identify what my students already knew, so that I could write more specific learning objectives for the term. I designed a task that would show me how well students could:

- identify the key components of a text
- use any subject specific vocabulary they may have learnt in primary school, without being prescriptive with the terms I was looking for, and instead seeing what they came up with
- structure their sentences
- structure their paragraphs.

Engaging in formative assessment

I had my students watch a short film with no words, and then asked them to write a paragraph that answered the following question:

What is the message of the short film, and how is it shown through the film?

Once students had some time to draft their ideas, we watched the film again so that they could add extra detail. Once they finished their paragraph, I had them submit their work for feedback.

Learning from the formative assessment

I used a developmental rubric (with explicitly taught vocabulary in bold) to evaluate students' paragraphs. This helped me identify the skills that students needed to learn next. I used this rubric to write up 2-3 simple sentences of feedback that gave them clear next steps on how to improve. Before giving them my feedback, I asked students to look at the rubric and self-assess how they were progressing towards our learning outcomes. Asking students to self-assess before providing them with feedback allows them to reflect on their work. Self-assessment also helps them set their own goals for development, using the steps that I have given them as a starting point.

Curriculum outcome	Learning outcome	Mastered	High	At standard	Partial
Outcome 2: Demonstrates an understanding of how the choice of language features, images and vocabulary affects meaning	You can identify different aspects of the text that are used to create meaning, and tell me what it represents	Highlights a number of narrative techniques (terms) that are being used in the text and explains how they create meaning	Is able to name and explain how the narrative technique (term) being used in the text	Identifies a prominent aspect of the text	Identifies a non-prominent aspect in the text (something that is shown once, or not important to plot)
		Discusses how the narrative technique is used to create the theme	Uses inferred meaning of the aspect to discuss what this represents in the text as a whole	Infers how the aspect represents an idea bigger than the literal meaning	Assigns a literal meaning from the plot to the aspect

We then worked through an explicit teaching unit that focused on the teaching of vocabulary, such as theme, character, plot structure, and some more advanced terms such as symbolism, representation and metaphor. I used the information gathered from the paragraph activity to split the students into groups to focus on their targeted feedback as we

worked to learn the vocabulary and improve their writing skills.

I used lots of guided practice of writing paragraphs, using exemplar paragraphs as models, and designed scaffolds to help fill the gaps in their learning and develop their skills.

Reflection questions

How is practitioner-generated evidence being drawn on here?

How did the formative assessment inform the teaching and learning sequence in the class?

How do you use formative assessment to set learning goals for your students?

How can you design developmental rubrics to help students understand their next steps?