

## ECT Mentor session

**Module 3:** Developing quality pedagogy

**Week 9:** Building on pupils' prior knowledge through formative assessment

### Session Elements



discuss with a  
mentor



rehearsal

### Learning Intentions for this session

Your ECT will learn how to:

**Develop an understanding of different pupil needs by:**

**5b.** making use of formative assessment.

**Provide opportunity for all pupils to experience success by:**

**5e.** adapting lessons, whilst maintaining high expectations for all, so that all pupils have the opportunity to meet expectations.

**Meet individual needs without creating unnecessary workload by:**

**5k.** reframing questions to provide greater scaffolding or greater stretch.

### Introduction

In the last few self-directed study sessions, your mentee extended their knowledge of how flexible grouping can impact upon pupil achievement. They have considered how flexible grouping helps pupils to access work at the right level of challenge and enables effective interventions to take place.

In their most recent self-study session, they have considered how establishing pupils' prior knowledge is an essential part of teaching, that different pupils have differing levels of prior knowledge and that this affects the rate at which they learn. Your mentee experimented with scripting parts of their lesson, so as to help them to embed formative assessment: they will bring this script with them to your session.

In this session, you will help your mentee build on this activity by focusing on its practical implications. You will assist them in refining activities and approaches to be tried in the classroom: start by helping them explore their current practice and clarifying the ways in which the research might help to develop their impact on pupil success. Key goals for the session include helping them to understand a) why identifying prior knowledge is an essential classroom practice and b) how to identify the needs of individual pupils and support them effectively through formative assessment strategies.

## Research and Practice Summary

### Teaching new vocabulary to a group with a wide range of needs – a Year 5 class

Miss Gascoigne has a Year 5 class consisting of pupils with a variety of learning needs. She is beginning a new topic – the Ancient Egyptians – which will require pupils to understand challenging vocabulary and employ it with accuracy in their own writing.

Which of the strategies in this summary could she use to plan for the needs of her class?

**Pre-teaching** is the process of teaching a new concept to selected pupils prior to a lesson on the subject. This might, for example, involve teaching new vocabulary or a new mathematical concept before the first lesson on a topic, so that pupils who may otherwise struggle are able to access and keep up with the learning. The approach works equally well for all pupils.

Further examples of pre-teaching include:

- setting pre-reading as homework, so that pupils are more able to engage with the vocabulary and ideas within the lesson itself (this can be supported by parents/carers)
- independent research into a topic (e.g. the works of a famous artist, designer or musician) as a stimulus for the following lesson

Do you think Miss Gascoigne is likely to want to pre-teach the vocabulary for the new topic?

As you have seen already, one of the most important aspects of teaching is the ability to establish an accurate understanding of the pupils' **prior knowledge** within a given subject or domain. In this way, the teacher can start with where their pupils are and help them from there rather than working backwards from a long-term learning goal. It is also understood that increased prior knowledge reduces working memory load. As children develop, they accrue more knowledge across a range of contexts and this reduces the load on their working memory, allowing them to solve problems more rapidly.



To help you address the prior knowledge needs of your pupils, particularly as they learn at different rates, you should:

- wherever possible, talk to colleagues who taught them before or who teach them in other areas now, so you can benefit from their experience
- carefully assess their prior knowledge when planning how much new information to introduce (you may have to adapt your teaching in-lesson as you realise that their prior knowledge is not secure)
- provide explicit modelling and guidance, breaking problems down into steps (e.g. keywords and sentence starters for written work, simple teacher demonstrations for practical tasks)
- use worked examples with clear and minimal steps (including step-by-step visual guides)
- identify likely misconceptions and plan to prevent them from occurring (if you are able to co-plan with colleagues, that will help here)
- give them regular purposeful practice so they can consolidate learning in their long-term memory

Before beginning the topic, Miss Gascoigne does a word reading test to identify vocabulary that is familiar to pupils and to what extent they understand it. The list includes: archaeology, pyramid, pharaoh, slavery, River Nile and Nefertiti. Her aim is for pupils to be able to identify words and then be able to place them in context and remember them. This will reduce the load on their working memory as they learn new information. This small piece of pre-teaching allows her to circumvent some of the misconceptions that may have become established.

**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 Wiliam 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 Wiliam:

- clarifying, understanding and sharing learning intentions (e.g. by sharing clear success criteria for pupils at the outset of learning activities)
- engineering effective classroom discussions, tasks and activities that elicit evidence of learning (e.g. by using questioning and other forms of gathering information on pupil learning regularly throughout and across lessons)
- 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. explicitly teaching pupils strategies to monitor and regulate their own learning)

You will return to formative and other forms of assessment in Module 4.

Why is formative assessment so important to Miss Gascoigne as she teaches her pupils the vocabulary for the new topic?

**Reframing questions** is more than simply rewording them. If a pupil can’t answer a question, reframing it can allow them to approach it from a different angle. For example, rather than asking a pupil to ‘explain their reasoning’ for statement X, the teacher might ask them to provide reasons for and against believing statement X to be true. This may help the pupil realise they don’t always have to align themselves with one particular line of reasoning and to view problems and topics more holistically. Reframing questions can also help the teacher diagnose barriers to learning and help pupils think problems through rather than simply giving up at the first sign of difficulty.



To help all your pupils make better progress, you can reframe questions to:

- provide more support for those who need it by offering greater scaffolding (e.g. by narrowing down the options in an answer: ‘What were causes of the Great War?... Name me an important cause of the War... Was it important that the great powers had been building up their armies and navies before the War?’)
- stretch those pupils who are ready for it (e.g. by politely challenging their reasoning: ‘Shamim, why do some people in the class disagree with your answer?...Shamim, try to change my mind about this...’)

**Relationships** between teachers and **parents/carers** are generally considered to be crucial to a child’s educational experience. Sometimes we use other terms to mean similar things e.g. parental involvement, engagement or participation. Attending a parents’ evening may be considered as ‘parental involvement’ with the school, whilst parents/carers regularly reading with their child would come under the heading of ‘parental engagement’ with learning. Building effective relationships with families can improve pupils’ motivation, behaviour and academic success; it can help teachers to better understand their pupils’ individual circumstances so that they can be effectively supported in school.

Schools always need to nurture their relationships with families, but this is probably even more important for families of children with special educational needs or disabilities.



To help to build effective relationships with parents, carers and families, you should:

- speak to the pastoral teams in your school and get their advice
- prepare well for parents' evenings, making sure you know well what your pupils' strengths are, what they need to do to improve, and what families might be able to do to help
- where you have concerns about how best to communicate with a family, ask a trusted colleague to help you to script some scenarios

Schools work with parents/carers in diverse ways, depending upon the community in which they serve. The Education Endowment Foundation's (2015) 'Working with parents to support children's learning' is a very useful guidance report.

After the pre-lesson word reading test, Miss Gascoigne sent the test home with the pupils with a request that parents rehearse the words with their children.

By identifying the prior knowledge of her pupils, Miss Gascoigne was able to plan effectively for the range of needs in the classroom, using strategies to both support and challenge pupils learning at different rates. To ensure mastery of more complex vocabulary, she used a range of strategies:

- she explained the meaning with child-friendly definitions
- she provided examples of how the vocabulary is used
- she asked the children to repeat the word at least 3 times
- she planned activities to use the word correctly (verbal sentences, sentences on whiteboard, word searches, act out the word, close texts)
- to support their long-term memory, the vocabulary was posted on a word wall and the words were reviewed daily for a week or so

Before teaching the topic, Miss Gascoigne conducted a word reading test because she realised that, for many, lack of prior knowledge of the words would be a barrier to their learning on the topic. This test also doubled as a form of pre-teaching, which was an extra assistance for those who are learning at a different rate. Because she has built good relations with the parents of her pupils, she was confident of their support when she sent the word test home for them to rehearse with their children. The range of strategies that she then used in the lesson supported all the pupils to expand

their working vocabularies.

## **Mentor Meeting Activities**

Throughout the session, try to refer explicitly to the Learning Intentions and encourage your mentee to record key points in their Learning Log. Tailor your use of the Theory to Practice activities below in response to the Review and Plan section of this session.

### **Review and Plan 5 mins**

Clarify the Learning Intentions for this session with your mentee.

At the start of this module, you looked at all of the 'learn how to' statements for Standards 4 and 5 and conducted a module audit with your mentee: in some areas they will already be confident and skilled; in others they will want more practice and support from you and others. Look back at this audit now and use it to help decide how you and your mentee will make the most productive use of the suggested Theory to Practice activities below.

### **Theory to Practice 40 mins**



#### **1. Rehearsal**

Your mentee has scripted some lines that they can use with their class when deploying formative assessment strategies to understand and build upon pupils' prior knowledge. They had 3 different pupils in mind. Ask them now to rehearse these with you. This was the grid they used.

Parts of the lesson	Ideas for your script
Introducing learning intentions	Who can tell me what our learning intentions mean?
Asking and responding to questions	Would someone like to agree with C's answer there and give a reason?
Giving instructions	Now that you have heard the instruction from me, tell your partner in your own words what it is I want you to do
Setting up peer- and self-assessment	What were the three best parts of the work? What one thing would make it better?

Try not to interrupt, but listen for and make your own notes on:

- how they have allowed for the different needs that their pupils have, the different rates at which they learn and their differing levels of prior knowledge (5.1, 5.2, 5.7)
- how they adapt the next phase of their lesson after assessing their pupils formatively (5b.)
- the extent to which they adapt their language while maintaining high expectations of all (5e.)
- the extent to which they reframe questions to provide greater scaffolding and greater stretch (5k.)



## 2. Discussion with mentor

Now share your notes with your mentee. There is a very strong chance that they will not have done all of the above.

Decide whether you ought to work with them to improve on an area where they are already confident or one that they have paid little attention to before. Help them to rescript their lines.



To support this discussion:

- you could point out to them language that is better avoided (because it is personal or tends to fix a mindset):

You can't do this   You are great at this   You are lazy; you aren't trying  
That's the right answer!

- you could advise them to use language like this (because it maintains high expectations and is responsive to the pupils):

Why do you think this is...?   Let me put that another way   What extra information would help you answer...?   Let's look at... again to see if we change our answers   After this feedback, how can we improve...?

- you could help them to reframe questions and instructions



### 3. Rehearsal

If there is time, rehearse their script again.

#### Next Steps 5 mins

Agree with your mentee how they will now put their learning from this week's session(s) into practice in their teaching. Help your mentee to clarify:

1. the action(s) they will take and how these action(s) are expected to contribute to improving pupil learning
2. what success will 'look like' in relation to these action(s)
3. how they will evaluate their success in taking these action(s)

Note the date of your next mentor meeting, when you will check on your mentee's progress.