ECT Mentor session

Module 4: Making productive use of assessment
Week 2: Fundamental principles of effective assessment (2)

Session Elements

discussion with mentor

collaborative planning

analyse artefacts

sharing of practice

Learning Intentions for this session

Your ECT will learn that:

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

6.2   Good assessment helps teachers avoid being over-influenced by potentially misleading factors, such as how busy pupils appear.

Your ECT will learn how to:

Avoid common assessment pitfalls, by:

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).

6c.   Choosing, where possible, externally validated materials, used in controlled conditions when required to make summative assessments.

Introduction

In their self-directed study session last week (week 1 of Module 4), your mentee extended their knowledge of some fundamental principles of assessment. They spoke to a colleague about the different ways that they use assessment in their practice. They then worked on planning assessment for a forthcoming lesson, which you will work on together in this session.

This week (week 2 of Module 4), your mentee should have attended ECT training focused on statements 6.2, 6a, 6b and 6c of the Early Career Framework. In this session you will help your mentee build on their learning from both their self-directed study and the ECT training session. You may find it helpful to work through the materials available to your ECT to support the training session as part of your preparation for this ECT mentor meeting.

Research and Practice Summary

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 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, 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 often make use of a multiple-choice format to 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 a correct answer stems 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 wrong 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

▪ 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 useful 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.

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 Standard 6 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. Analyse artefacts / collaborative planning

Work together with your mentee to review and improve the planned assessment activities from their self-directed study session in week 1 of this module. Make sure the assessment activities are linked to lesson objectives, will generate useful assessment data about pupils' understanding and make efficient use of both pupil and teacher time. Select one or two of these activities for the mentee to use during the forthcoming planned lesson/session.

As part of their self-directed study, your mentee identified what they thought was their 'best' assessment method of the three they prepared. Ask them to return to this now and see whether they have revised their judgement. Prompt your mentee to share their reasoning, and use your expertise to highlight where they reason well. As needed, respond to their comments with your own perception of the relative strengths of the different approaches discussed.

To support this activity, you could:

- ask your mentee to connect their reasoning to this week's Research and Practice Summary and to the content of the Module 4 ECT training session

- support your own feedback with explicit reference to the Research and Practice Summary

- be clear, where you highlight strengths, why these are positive, with reference to the contents of the Early Career Framework

- use the Research and Practice Summary to help you suggest ways to further improve your mentee's planning

2. Sharing of practice

Model with your mentee how you make use of patterns of performance over multiple assessments to draw conclusions about your pupils' learning. Share some examples of your own inferences about pupils' learning from their performance in one or more assessments.

Explain how you adapt your assessment practice to respond to different pupil needs (especially across different age phases) and the nature of the learning that you are assessing.

To support this explanation, you could:
- talk through two recent sequences of assessment conducted with pupils in contrasting key stages, contrasting subject areas or assessing different types of learning (vocational/academic or theory/practical, for example)
- pick out similarities and differences in how you constructed each sequence of assessment, and link these to the characteristics of your pupils and the nature of what was being assessed
- ask your mentee to connect your explanation to the content of the ECT training session that looked at patterns of performance over multiple assessments

3. Discuss with mentor

Talk about the use of summative assessment in your mentee's phase/specialism and how these judgements are reached. Discuss opportunities to make use of externally validated materials to support summative assessment, in line with the school's agreed assessment practices for your mentee's phase/specialism.

To support this discussion, you could:

- use the internet or resources held at your school to show your mentee the range of materials available to support summative assessment in their phase/specialism

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.