

Reflection Paper

Subject: Sophomore English

Grade: 10

Module 4: Assessment for Active Learning : Teacher implements instruction in order to engage students in rigorous and relevant learning and to promote their curiosity about the world at large by:

Selected Indicator: Using and/or designing a variety of formative assessments and summative assessments and criteria that directly align with the learning objectives and value the diversity of ways in which students learn. See additional notes at the end of the document.

Goal:

I will learn how to create and use formative assessments (pre and post) to inform my instruction on using literary elements by writing short stories. As a result, students will improve their understanding of the author's craft and literary elements on the summative assessment.

Initial Summary:

Currently, I have noticed that my instruction relies mostly on summative assessments when gauging student understanding. The differentiation that currently exists in my instruction and materials are not consistently defined by formative assessments, but mostly on Individual Education Plans (IEPs). While the implementation of IEPs is grossly important, I feel that differentiation should also be tailored to learning objectives based on what students have yet to master. My current team of 10th grade English teachers collaboratively develop Common Assessments for each quarter, based on the quarter's skills and domain vocabulary focus. However, these assessments were being given at the end of each quarter, giving very little time to use the data to re-instruct or tweak instruction before moving on to the next set of skills. Already, the team has elected to give the assessment mid-quarter, in an attempt to allot more time for re-teaching and assessment. In addition to the common assessment, I currently evaluate students based on unit objectives, finding evidence in the work they produce. I currently do not use pre and post assessments to determine student needs.

Reflection:

TEAM Reflection: Module 4 (Assessment)

DRAFT

In the beginning of this module, my mentor and I chose the first indicator because we felt that the current assessments being used were mostly summative. Therefore, the goal was to create more formative assessments that were tied directly to the learning objectives for the unit. Before this was possible, I felt I needed more information on what good assessments, both formative and summative, looked like. My mentor and I spent time combing through resources until we settled on two excerpts that we felt addressed the information we were looking for. These resources proved helpful in providing a clear picture of what formative and summative assessment looked like, the difference between the two, and research-based approaches to literacy assessment in the classroom.

As part of this module I worked closely with the Professional Learning Community (PLC) for 10th grade English teachers at my school. As a group, we build common assessments linked directly to the concepts and skills we teach each quarter. During the span of this module, we focused our teaching on the literary elements commonly found in a short story and how an author crafts and manipulates these elements in a text. We decided as a group that the final summative assessment would be for students to write a short story of their own, showing that they could manipulate some of the elements we explored in class. However, we also felt it was necessary to develop a common formative assessment (CFA) that broke down student understanding of each element and how it was used in a piece of literature. Before this common assessment took place, I needed to assess how prepared my students were already, based on the elements they would encounter on the CFA. In order to do that, I needed to consider multiple elements in creating formative assessments for each piece they would be asked to understand both on the CFA, and be able to manipulate in their short story.

One of the excerpts provided a clear definition of formative assessment that helped clear away some of my cloudy preconceptions about the form of assessment. Almeida et al. (2011) defined formative assessment as “ongoing assessments, observations, summaries, and reviews that inform teacher instruction and provide and provoke students’ feedback.” They go on to describe it further with a metaphor related to farming, comparing formative assessment to harvesting student understanding like a farmer would harvest his crop. In truth, formative assessment could consist of many different things. Once I had a clear view of what formative assessment looked like, I decided to focus directly on how I was assessing students throughout the writing process. This way, students could look at the rubric as stepping stones. Once they had mastered one level, it was time to try working on the next. However, I encountered a problem with the rubric the 10th grade PLC had developed together. This problem consisted of a combination of two things. First, I found that many students did not read the rubric prior to drafting their short stories, and were therefore scoring very low on the scale provided. Also, there was not a clear progression of skills/content from one level to the next. This led me to my next point of research.

I immediately set out to find resources on writing effective rubrics and grading scales. In another of the readings, I researched how to tie the

language of the rubric or assessment scale directly to the learning goals of a unit. In *Classroom Strategies that Work: Formative Assessment and Standards Based Grading*, it became clear that the use of rubrics was highly effective in determining student success regarding the learning objectives. The chapter entitled “The Need for New Scale,” delved into the need for a clear scale for student achievement with the use of rubrics to formatively assess student success by identifying simpler aspects of any given learning objective to include in the scale. This was done on a 4-point scale. If a student achieved the target learning goal, they would receive a 3.0/4.0. If the student went beyond that to the more complex content, they would receive a 4.0 on the scale. If a student only achieved the simpler content, they would receive a 2.0. The reading also showed how this scale could be modified to further break down student achievement and give partial credit (for students who only achieved the simple, target, and complex goals with moderate success).

To test this approach, I modified the current Short Story Writing Rubric that the 10th grade PLC developed together, to fit this 4-point scale. First, I identified the simple, target and complex goals that would be included on the rubric. There were four targeted skills to assess, so below is an example that I used for conflict development:

4.0—Students will develop an internal conflict in their short story that forces their protagonist to make a moral decision that directly affects the resolution of the story.

3.0—Students will develop an internal conflict in their short story that forces their protagonist to make a moral decision.

2.0—Students will write an internal conflict in their short story that requires their protagonist to make a choice.

1.0—Students, with help, will have partial success at score 2.0 or 3.0 content.

0.0—Students, with help, have no success at score 2.0 or 3.0 content.

This scale built in the notion of dependence for students who require differentiation or assistance in completing the assignment, which was extremely helpful at all levels. The amount of distinction between the scaling steps (based on partial credit) remained up to the individual teacher. There was a clearer progression of success from one level to the next that was not necessarily clear to students in the original rubric. The other

thing that worked well with the new scale was that it focused on student success, rather than student failure. It allowed students to work on the simpler content to gain confidence and attempt the more complex content, exposing them to the more rigorous content, even if they were still mastering the simpler content. This created the “stepping stone” quality I was looking for in an assessment.

While this rubric would ultimately be the summative assessment, it gave immediate feedback to students about what they could improve in their story, before taking a look at my individualized comments on their draft. I also created numerous evaluation tasks that asked students to look at the development of the concepts in the short stories of their peers, which provided formative assessment on student understanding of the individual concepts. Students complained about the repetitive nature of the assignments, being so focused on each of the four concepts they had to demonstrate in their short story, but the assessment tasks did provide specific feedback on both sides. Not only did the assignments show the level of students’ understanding of the simpler context, but it allowed them to look critically at another student’s piece and gain insight on possible ways to improve their own. Once they gave feedback to their peer, they could then look directly to their next step toward improving their own stories. Early on, these assignments acted as “pre-assessments” of what students already knew and understood about characterization, conflict, mood, and plot development. In the beginning, students defined ways in which these elements were developed in a text, using examples from things we had read during the year, and examples they were already comfortable using. Then, taking those criteria, they began to develop their own characters, conflict, mood, and plot that ultimately were put together in their short story.

It became clear that the key to creating these “continuous” assessments was the information it provided to students about their progress, as well as the information it provided me as their teacher. When it came down to improving their work, the comments were much more useful, but students tended to focus more on the grade itself. However, when no grade was given, students tended not to revise their responses. To balance this, I gave out an “initial grade” based on their progress. When students revised their work, that grade improved. When they didn’t, it was their decision. This made them accountable for their own work. Students began to see the value in revising their work and putting in an effort to get better. This alone was valuable feedback to them that effort was important, and that each student should do their best work. It also provided them specific ways to improve and show that they care about the quality of their stories, and how to make them better. In *Standards and Assessments: The Core of Quality Instruction*, a chapter about formative assessment and feedback stressed the importance of highlighting strengths as well as make note of improvements that needed to be made. This was differentiation at its finest, as it allowed students to improve based on their own foundation of knowledge. Some of this feedback was done one-on-one. The entire class would be working on an assignment or their drafts, and I would circulate the room, sitting with each student for five minutes, talking to them about how their draft was going, ask them to show me a part they wanted some feedback on, and talk through what they could improve based on the assignment focuses. These conferences proved extremely valuable in getting students past the basic concepts and at least partially into the more complex concepts.

After completing this unit, I brought my assessment materials to the 10th grade PLCs and told them about what I found in all these endeavors. I shared how the assessment tasks I created for students to evaluate each other's stories was providing immediate feedback to students on what they needed to improve and work on in their own drafts. I also talked to them about the disparity I saw between the rubric we created and what I had found about writing effective grading scales in my research for this paper. In doing this, I was able to show them directly how each step of the scale was directly related to the learning objective. Before, the steps were related to the skills, but not necessarily in the language of the learning objective. Through this, we were able to see how clear the second version of the rubric was, broken down by skill, whereas the previous rubric was organized by the following categories: Development of Ideas, Organization of Ideas, and Language Faculty and Conventions. These categories themselves were not tied to the objectives, and so it only made sense that students could not see a clear progression of the objective in how they were being assessed. We used this feedback to better direct how we wrote our Common Formative Assessment for the unit.

Overall, I learned that I was not giving my students clear, descriptive feedback to help them be successful in the short story assignment. Once this became clear, I rewrote the rubric and tied it directly to the skills in the objectives, instead of aspects of the rubric that were vague and, to the students eye, unrelated to the task at hand. Once students saw that there was a clear progression, they were able to work at their own pace, mastering the skills within their range, while still being exposed to the more complex tasks. In the future, I plan on looking at my assessment tools more closely, especially rubrics, to make sure there is a clear "stepping stone" model for students to look at. This way, students may be more independent and take charge of their own learning, because mastering one level means moving on to the next. This will give students more autonomy in the classroom, and allow their skills to develop more naturally. Overall, it would allow students to take charge of their own learning, which is important at any age, but especially with adolescents, as they are learning to become more independent as they develop into adulthood.