Formative Assessment – Refine learning continuum

[Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority. The logo for the Victoria State Government. Formative Assessment – Refine learning continuum.]

NARRATOR: Hi, I'm Pam. I will be presenting this video about how to refine a learning continuum.

[A flow chart with three stages: Plan, Assess, Review. The Plan stage lists "describe a learning continuum," "develop a formative assessment rubric," and "design a task," unpacking parts 1 and 2 of the Guide to Formative Assessment Rubrics of the Victorian Curriculum, F to 10. The Assess stage lists "collect evidence," "moderate," and "interpret and uses evidence," unpacking part 3 of the guide. The Review stage lists "improve rubrics," "refine learning continuum," and "refine task," which is part of review and refine for best practice.]

NARRATOR: This is the second video within the Review section of the formative assessment videos. This video relates to refining the learning continuum, originally described in part one of the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority's Guide to Formative Assessment Rubrics. When it is time to refine the learning continuum, you should already have used the rubrics to assess students and improved the rubrics by refining the actions and quality criteria.

By the end of this video, you will know how to review both the placement of criteria within an action and the phase descriptions to ensure they match with any newly aligned criteria. To do this, you will draw on the experiences of assessing and recording students using the rubric. It might seem like too much work to bother with, once you've already taken the time to revise your actions and quality criteria. But revising the placement of the criteria is important because this is where you may learn something new about the learning of your students.

The idea of revising the placement of quality criteria within the rubric is to capture typical patterns from your students. These typical patterns give you an insight into the order your students learn things, based on the evidence they have shown you in their assessments. This is where the real power is for your teaching and learning because you can leverage these typical patterns to help you get greater learning for your students, and this video will show you how.

Let's focus on the meaning of the columns in the rubric. Each column represents skills and knowledge that students typically develop at the same time. Often the criteria within a column are linked by an underlying understanding that students are developing as they move into that phase of learning. As students develop this understanding, the sophistication of their work across different actions changes in ways that are linked. Because of this, when you're assessing student work, it will be usual to see that most of the criteria you assign to a student would be in or near the same column of the rubric. Of course, there are always students who are exceptions to the rule because student development is not always that neat, but it is typicality you are trying to capture here.

[A generic rubric design, with a learning continuum along the top and four subsequent phases. Each phase corresponds to a set of quality criteria. Additionally, below the continuum is a column for organising elements, matched up with columns labelled "Action" and “Insufficient evidence”. All four phases and their respective criteria are highlighted, and a red box encloses the column for phase one.]

NARRATOR: On the screen, you'll see a generic learning continuum and associated rubrics. We'll use this to demonstrate how to review the placement of criteria within the rubric. The criteria are numbered according to the action, and then the order of the criteria within the action. For example, Criterion 3.2 is numbered because it is in Action 3 and it is the second criterion in the action, even though it is in Phase 3. In this example, Criterion 1.1, 2.1 and 3.1 are all in the same column. This suggests that these three criteria are typically present in the same student work samples. That is, students assessed at Criterion 1.1 tend also to be assessed at 2.1 and 3.1. Now that you have marked the task, you will have an idea if this is true or not. If you need to, go back and look at the student work that you have assessed. Let's say that you did often give 1.1 and 2.1 to the same students. This means that they belong in the same column. However, what if you noticed that students who got 3.1 tended to get 1.2 and 2.2 as well? This would mean you should shift 3.1 so that it is in the same column as 1.2 and 2.2.

[Criterion 3.1 shifts one space to the right so it is underneath the now-highlighted phase two column.]

NARRATOR: Now that 3.1 has been moved, it better represents the typical patterns of learning you see in your students. You can use this same method to review the remainder of the columns, shifting criteria across as required. It may be that you need to change the number of columns to capture the typical patterns, and if that is the case, just add or remove columns as needed.

[The column for phase four is highlighted.]

NARRATOR: Let's imagine that in this example, students that were assessed at 2.3 were also usually assessed at 3.3, but that very few students managed to reach Criteria 1.4. If that is the case, it would be useful to add a new column. Adding the new column reminds you when teaching that you should teach students about the ideas in Criteria 2.3 and 3.3 before you teach them the harder idea behind Criterion 1.4.

[A fifth column and corresponding phase is added, and Criterion 1.4 is shifted to the new phase five.]

NARRATOR: With the new column, there are now five columns of criteria in the rubric. Adding a new column should also prompt you to look at whether there are more criteria that could be added to other actions within the rubric too. Ideally, you would have noticed this when you were reviewing your quality criteria, but now is a good chance to double check.

[The row containing all five phases and their respective descriptions is highlighted.]

NARRATOR: Once you're happy with the number of columns and the criteria arrangement within them, it is time to move on to reviewing the wording of the phase descriptions. You may end up adding descriptions for new columns that have been added or combining descriptions when columns have been removed.

The aim is for each phase description to be a synthesis of the criteria within the column. If possible, the description should capture the underlying understanding of students at that phase. As you read across the phase descriptions, you should see the shifts in student understanding or thinking or development because the purpose of the phase descriptions are to help you with your teaching and the students with their learning. By making transformations from one phase to the next obvious, they are more useful.

When writing phase descriptions, remember that you can go beyond the criteria themselves. This is because you chose a sample of actions to assess from all the possible actions that could have been assessed, and the criteria reflect the actions you chose to sample. The phase descriptions are more than just an aggregation of the criteria. They describe the learning of students and so can incorporate learning that goes beyond the actions and criteria that you used for this particular assessment.

To describe this learning, it is a good idea to still focus on the verbs that you use, but the strict language that is advised to be used for quality criteria does not apply for the phases. This is because the phase descriptions serve a different purpose to the criteria. They are not there to provide reliable assessment. They are there to describe the underlying learning.

Writing phase descriptions is a skill that you build over time. The first ones you write may not live up to everything discussed here, but it is possible to get better at it with practice. Once you've finished revising the phase descriptions, you are ready to use your revised learning continuum in the classroom. Because the phase descriptions highlight the shifts students make in their learning over time, they can help you plan teaching and learning activities to help students make these transitions. You can also use them to informally assess on the go, making use of observations you make of your students and their work during teaching and during classroom conversations.

Because the learning continuum is simple enough to keep in your head while you teach, you can interpret these observations against the continuum and use it to make on-the-spot adjustments about the zone of proximal development and the zone of actual development of your students. This makes it easy for you to give purposeful directed feedback to your students in an informal manner during class.

You are now ready to review the placement of your criteria within your rubric and refine the phase descriptions. Once you have done so, you can use your revised learning continuum in your classroom.

[More information available at vcaa.vic.gov.au. Authorised and published by the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority.]