Formative Assessment – Design a task

[Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority. The logo for the Victoria State Government. Formative Assessment – Design a task.]

NARRATOR: Hi, I'm Pam. I'll be presenting this video about how to design a task.

[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 third video in the Plan section of the formative assessment videos. This video relates to part two of the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority Guide to Formative Assessment Rubrics.

When it is time to design a task, you should already have described to learning continuum and developed a rubric to cover the knowledge and/or skills you want to assess. By the end of this video, you will know how to design a formative assessment task to collect evidence matched to a learning continuum and associated rubric.

Let's go through some of the big ideas in task design. These ideas will help you to design a new task or select a task that already exists. They apply to both formal assessment tasks like assignments and tests, as well as informal tasks like classroom observations and discussions with students. Whether the task is new or recycled, it needs to elicit accurate evidence of what the students know and can do. There are many ways that accuracy is affected and we discuss these in more detail later in this presentation.

Tasks also need to be efficient. Schools are busy places and time and resources spent assessing students take away from those available for teaching and learning. Formative assessment tasks need to take as little classroom time as possible to maximise learning time for students. The tasks also need to be quick and easy for teachers to assess. Efficient tasks provide maximum opportunities to improve teaching and learning.

Let's look at how to improve the accuracy of assessment tasks in more detail. The most important point is to design a task that collects sufficient evidence of what students do, say, make or write, while still being mindful of how much time you are taking to formatively assess. Often, this is about how many opportunities the students are given to show what they know and can do. For example, if you want to know how well students analyse data, it is a good idea to give them more than one opportunity to do so. This will allow you to see how consistent they are.

It is also important to minimise the influence of external factors, factors other than those you are trying to measure. For example, if a student writes slowly, it might lead them to not giving detail in their answers, limiting your ability to assess higher order reasoning. You might be able to collect the evidence more accurately via a discussion with the student. You want to do everything you reasonably can to minimise the influence of these external factors because they get in the way of you truly gauging what a student knows and can do.

Perhaps the biggest external factor is student motivation. It is so important that it warrants particular attention. The more motivated students are to do their best in the task, the more accurate your evidence will be. For summative assessments, students may be motivated because the result will be reported to themselves or their parents. For tasks with a purely formative purpose, it is important to find other ways to engage them. Try to design tasks which are interesting and which allow student choice.

There are three main design options to think about. The task can assess the whole rubric, a sample of actions within a rubric, or a subset of phases in an initial task with follow up tasks for some students. We will look at these options separately so you can see how they are best used.

[An example 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”.]

NARRATOR: Whole rubric is the most basic type of task. It assesses the actions in all the rows of the rubric and gives students the opportunity to demonstrate all the criteria, no matter which phase or column they are in. To design a task which assesses the whole rubric, you think about a task that will allow you to assess all the actions and phases. In the example shown, the rubric is assessing how well students acquire and use digital data via a device. It contains four actions and four phases.

[The rows corresponding to the actions of “Presents data” and “Interprets data” are highlighted, along with their respective quality criteria.]

NARRATOR: If your rubric contains lots of actions or if you already have recent evidence about some actions, then you may decide to only assess a sample of all the actions in the rubric. These might be the most important actions to inform your upcoming teaching, or they might be actions for which you don't have recent evidence.

Let's imagine that in their most recent task, your students collected data. You have lots of evidence about how well students collect and store data so there is no need to collect more evidence about this action. But you have no evidence about how well they present or interpret data. Your task would need to be one which assessed the other two actions in the rubric by prompting students to present and interpret data. This could either be done explicitly or by giving a task that directs students to present and interpret data.

If you were already familiar with the ability of your class, you might know that most students are working between phases two and three of your learning continuum, you don't think you have any students at phase one, and only a handful of phase four. With this in mind, you could design an initial task that assesses the criteria within phases two and three to give to all your students. This acts as a screening task, and you can have a follow up task for those students who achieve all those criteria. The follow up task specifically elicits the criteria within phase four. This additional task may be more involved or take more teacher time to assess, but only a small number of students will need to do the follow up task.

As well as designing your task, you will also need to develop administration guidelines. The purpose of administration guidelines is to make sure that teachers administer the assessment in a way that will collect accurate evidence. Administration involves everything the teacher does to facilitate the students doing the assessment task. This includes explaining the tasks to students, setting the conditions under which the task is done, dealing with student questions and requests, and ensuring that students submit work that is authentically their own.

You've already thought about designing a task that captures a student's ability in the curriculum focus. This can be assisted through the administration by making sure the students are engaged in the task. This may be how you introduce the task or the timing of the task within the day or week. Think too about if you want to introduce stop rules – places in the task where students who are not experiencing success can officially end the task early. These can stop students giving up when they think they can't be successful.

Administration should also ensure the evidence is the student's own work. Think about whether students will be allowed to complete the task at home or how they will be allowed to engage with classmates. If you were assessing in real time, as students perform actions in class, it is important to think about how you will record the evidence as you go. Writing this down in the administration guidelines means there is time to think through how this will be done ahead of time. It's also important that the evidence is timely. We're thinking about just in time rather than just in case. Plan for the time to be minimised between the administration and use of the data, and that only the data needed for formative assessment is collected.

You are now ready to select which approach - whole rubric, sample of actions, or subset of phases – will work best for you. You can then design or select a task or tasks to assess your students accurately and in the most efficient way. You are also ready to write the administration guidelines for the task.

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