Formative Assessment – Improve rubric

[Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority. The logo for the Victoria State Government. Formative Assessment – Improve rubric.]

NARRATOR: Hi, I'm Narelle. I will be presenting this video about improving rubrics.

[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 first video within the Review section of the formative assessment videos. This video relates to improving the formative assessment rubrics originally described in part two of the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority Guide to Formative Assessment Rubrics. When it is time to improve your rubric, you should already have used the rubric to assess your students.

By the end of this video, you will know how to check and improve your rubric to ensure it enables you to gather accurate evidence about students when assessing the curriculum. You almost always need to make some modifications to your rubric after you use it for the first time. As a first step, it is good to check what worked well and what needs to be revised. Some ways to tell if your rubric needs to be reviewed is to reflect on whether it was easy to use. Did you find that you were able to elicit evidence and make teaching plans for all your students? Were you able to use the rubric to target your feedback for your students? You should first identify the actions and quality criteria that worked well in this regard. Actions and quality criteria that identify distinct shifts in quality for elements of student work samples and can be easily matched to this work and are a good indication that your criteria in your rubric are addressing the core ideas in your focus area. You may still need to review wording, however.

If you are working with a team, it is important that the team make similar decisions using the rubric. When you are working with the team to moderate similar work samples of students, would all teachers assess students at the same level on your rubric? Even if you feel your rubric worked well, you should also reflect on some of your initial decisions about actions. You should check if the actions were representative of the learning continuum. Did the actions contained within the rubric provide accurate evidence related to the learning continuum? Were they adequate in providing you with enough information to plan teaching so the students could make progress related to the phases in the learning continuum? Were the actions appropriate for eliciting evidence matched to the learning continuum? If you need to add, modify or delete any actions, do that prior to checking your criteria.

The next step for review is to check whether the wording used in the quality criteria supported consistent assessment. When you were assessing student work, did you find you made consistent decisions? Was it easy to look at student work and match it to quality criteria? If you worked in a team, did the team make the same decisions using quality criteria in the rubric? If not, the wording in quality criteria may need to be modified. The next few slides will identify some common problems in rubric writing and how they can be addressed. When writing quality criteria, you need to be sure that the quality criteria are written in transparent language, which don't rely on adjectives and adverbs or negative language when identifying shifts in quality. Verbs and precise terminology should be used to describe student behaviours, as this ensures consistency of assessment among teachers and within classes. For example, adjectives such as appropriate, suitable, excellent, poor and mediocre can lead to inconsistent marking and disagreements amongst teachers as to what these terms mean. Negative descriptions of student sophistication where criteria describes what they have not done, can mean that teachers are unable to accurately identify what students have achieved, and lead to uncertainty about which criteria best match the quality of a student's actions.

When writing quality criteria, use one idea in each criterion. If there is more than one idea, it will be difficult to decide whether to place the students at a particular criterion as they may have achieved one part of the criterion, but not the other. The best way to test this is to see if the word 'and' is used in your criterion. The presence of the word 'and', especially when separating two verbs, often suggests there are two ideas in a criterion. In the example ‘Applied scientific method and described results using technical terminology’, there are two distinct skills that should be assessed independently. This criterion should be distributed across two actions - one about using the scientific method and another about using technical terminology.

[A flow chart showing three stages: original, observed, and improved. In original, an action is followed by criteria 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3. However, in observed, the positions of 1.2 and 1.3 are reversed. Finally, in improved, the criteria are returned to their correct order.]

NARRATOR: When assessing student work, it may be the case that you discover that the order of quality criteria within an action from the original was not correct. For example, you may find that a particular skill written in the rubric would be easier than another is not the case when assessing student work samples. In this example, after using student work to trial the rubric, the assessors found that Criterion. 1.2 was in fact more difficult than 1.3. Using the original order of quality criteria meant that assessment results were inconsistent and the rubric was difficult to use. After ordering the quality criteria correctly by placing Criterion 1.2 above Criterion 1.3, the assessors found the rubric matched student skill development for that action. You then need to rename the quality criteria so they are in order again.

[Three rows, labelled original, option one, and option two. In original, an action is followed by criteria 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3. Next to option one, criterion 1.3 is marked as “remove” while criterion 1.2 remains. In option two, criterion 1.3 remains, while criterion 1.2 is marked as “reword”.]

NARRATOR: After trialling the rubric, you may find that two criteria are so close in sophistication that it is difficult to tell which criterion to assign to the student. It may be that there is not enough of a step up in sophistication to justify the use of two quality criteria, or perhaps the quality criteria have been expressed in such a way that makes a distinction difficult. In this case, it is OK to remove one of the criterion, as not all cells need to be filled in a rubric. This is shown in Option 1. You may also want to reword one of the criterion to make the distinction between sophistication evident, as shown in Option 2.

[A longer row, where an action is followed by four criteria. Criterion 1.4, at the end, is tagged with “Add a new criterion”.]

NARRATOR: After trialling the rubric, you may also find that quality criteria don't capture the different degrees of quality in student work samples. For example, Criterion 1.1 and 1.2 may have worked well, but the students you assessed as being at Criterion 1.3 actually contain two different degrees of quality. It may be that additional Criterion 1.4 is required to accurately assess differences in sophistication. In this case, you can add additional criterion while remembering that a maximum of four quality criteria is advised for each action.

You are now ready to review and improve your rubric. Writing rubrics is an iterative process and it is worth taking the time to review your rubric. It can often be much improved by simple word changes and a review of actions after trialling your rubric with students.

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