Ambition Institute

# MENTOR HANDBOOK

## S9 | SUBJECT: ASSESSING FOR FORMATIVE PURPOSES

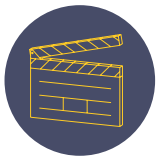
## STUDY

### KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR THIS MODULE

Your teacher can check pupils' developing understanding by:

- Recognising that summative assessment has value, but that it cannot provide rapid, detailed information about pupil understanding.
- Formative assessment practices can provide valuable information about what pupils have understood and gaps in their knowledge.
- Formative assessment should be designed around how the information it provides will be used.

Get yourself into a strong position to mentor your teacher by working through the following:



**CLICK TO WATCH MODULE VIDEO**

Or visit ambition.org.uk/ecf

**READ THE EVIDENCE SUMMARY BELOW:**

### TEACHING CHALLENGE

Mr Jones feels his lessons are increasingly clearly designed and convey the key ideas to his pupils. However, he often feels unsure how much pupils have understood during the lesson or by the end. Sometimes, end-of-unit assessments suggest that pupils have failed to grasp key ideas. How can Mr Jones develop ways to identify what pupils are thinking – and what they have misunderstood – in order to ensure they are all meeting the learning goals?

### KEY IDEA

Effective formative assessment shows the teacher what pupils are thinking: this makes it possible to meet pupils' needs, making it more likely they will meet learning goals.

## THE ROLE OF SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT

Mr Jones encounters many forms of external assessment on a regular basis in school. Often, pupils complete practice versions of external exams or commercially-developed tests in order to demonstrate progress or highlight gaps in their knowledge. However, the information this provides often comes too late to enable him to make the kind of changes he hopes to make. He is unwilling to wait until the end of the key stage to find out exactly how much pupils have understood.

Mr Jones' initial idea is that he will adapt these external assessments and use them in his lessons. However, this proves problematic. These assessments are designed to demonstrate what pupils have learned over a long period of time (Wiliam & Black, 1996). To do so, many questions integrate knowledge of multiple concepts: a question may ask pupils to draw on their knowledge of algebra and number, to write a paragraph or to compare different concepts. Errors may not tell him whether a pupil lacks basic knowledge, misinterpreted the question or holds an underlying misconception (Christodoulou, 2017).

Creating exams and ensuring they are marked reliably is a complicated, intricate and time-consuming process: this is not something an individual teacher can easily simulate (Christodoulou, 2017). Mr Jones still wants his pupils to succeed in summative assessments and he uses them to help ensure he is teaching everything pupils need to know. Moreover, if he needs to make a summative judgement, he should choose these materials where possible and draw conclusions from patterns of performance over a number of these, while remembering that assessments draw inferences about learning from performance. However, his focus is identifying what pupils have learned - or misunderstood - in order to adapt his teaching accordingly. This means he focuses on using formative assessment.

## THE ROLE OF FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

An assessment is formative if it is designed to lead to a change in what the teacher (or the student) does (Black & Wiliam, 1998). Effective formative assessment practices help teachers collect evidence about pupil understanding and needs and adapt their teaching to support pupils to be more successful (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Speckesser et al., 2018). Mr Jones is aware of the risk of using 'poor proxies' for learning (Coe, 2013): of believing that students have understood because they are busy, engaged, working hard, or answering questions correctly even if they haven't fully understood or couldn't reproduce the work independently. All of these are valuable and desirable, but they do not show that pupils have understood the key ideas and avoided misconceptions.

## DESIGNING FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

Mr Jones' previous work identifying and setting clear learning goals proves useful in formulating precise assessment questions. He focuses on questions that show whether pupils have mastered the key idea in the lesson or whether they hold misconceptions – being particularly mindful of pupils with specific learning barriers linked to special educational needs or disabilities. It helps to design questions with data analysis in mind (Wiliam, 2014) and Mr Jones is mindful of this as he plans formative assessment.

For example, he knows that a fifty-question quiz will provide very detailed information about what every pupil understands but he also knows that he will not have time to review every pupils' quiz for at least a week. It is better to decide to choose one crucial question – and use the information he gains – than to choose several important questions and run out of time to ask them or assess students' answers. However, Mr Jones is aware that he will still need to be cautious about the conclusions he draws: pupils may produce correct answers now but struggle to recreate them in future (Coe, 2013; Christodoulou, 2017).

## USING FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

Once he has designed a formative assessment, Mr Jones applies it in class. He appreciates the need to gain a response from all pupils independently, since the answer of one pupil in discussion may influence that of other pupils. As a result, he gets his pupils to respond simultaneously, using whiteboards or on paper. Having collected the data, he is able to analyse it, adapt teaching and provide feedback as appropriate.

## NUANCES AND CAVEATS

Formative assessment, such as end of class questioning, is a powerful way to identify what pupils have understood in the moment. However, getting an answer correct one day doesn't mean that pupils will recall it in future: they are very likely to forget some of it. Formative assessment is most useful for identifying pupils' misconceptions or knowledge gaps and addressing them.

Formative assessment is an approach, not a technique. Using mini-whiteboards, exit tasks or hinge questions does not mean a teacher is using formative assessment: what matters is why and how they are used: if they are used to find out what pupils understand and to improve their understanding, the teacher is using formative assessment and practising responsive teaching (Christodoulou, 2017).

# SELECT

Before you observe, first select a **DEVELOPMENT AREA** to focus on. Next, familiarise youself with the **FOCUSED DEVELOPMENT AREAS**, as you will zoom in on one of these during your observation. Finally, craft a **PRECISE TARGET** when you observe your teacher (examples are provided below).

| DEVELOPMENT AREA | FOCUSED DEVELOPMENT AREA | EXAMPLE PRECISE TARGETS |
|---|---|---|
| Assessing for formative purposes | > **Teacher plans an assessment task that checks pupils have understood the key learning from the lesson and enables the identification of common misconceptions.**<br>> Teacher intentionally checks what pupils are understanding and uses the assessment task to identify gaps in knowledge, errors or misconceptions. | **If your teacher is...**<br>> **Not doing it at all:** Plan how you will assess pupils in a way that enables you to check pupils' understanding of the key learning.<br>> **Doing it but needs some improvement:** Plan how you will assess pupils in a way that enables you to check pupils' understanding of the key learning and deliberately targets a common misconception that pupils may hold related to the key learning.<br>> **Doing it well, but needs some stretch:** Plan how you will assess pupils in a way that enables you to check pupils' understanding of the key learning and deliberately targets multiple common misconceptions pupils may hold related to the key learning. |
| Whole-class diagnostic questions | > Teacher carefully frames to pupils the purpose of diagnostic questions.<br>> Teacher creates a set of diagnostic questions that specifically assess for understanding and misconceptions related to the critical knowledge they want pupils to have understood.<br>> Teacher ensures all pupils know how to display their answer to the diagnostic questions quickly so the teacher can check their responses and gauge pupil understanding. | |
| Delivering assessment for formative purposes | > Teacher plans the delivery of a task they are using to assess for formative purposes and follow-up questions to ensure they know if pupil answers stem from secure understanding.<br>> Teacher plans the sample size of pupils they will ask their question to and the way they want pupils to show their responses. | |

**RECORD YOUR THINKING HERE**

| DEVELOPMENT AREA | FOCUSED DEVELOPMENT AREA | EXAMPLE PRECISE TARGETS |
|---|---|---|
| (select before observing) | (select whilst observing) | (select/write whilst observing) |

# OBSERVE

Consider the following questions based on a short (approximately 15 minute) observation of your teacher.

What was your teacher's **previous** target? Are they meeting it? How do you know?

For the **DEVELOPMENT AREA** you are focussing on for this observation, what is your teacher already doing well?

Next, go to the previous page and select a **FOCUSED DEVELOPMENT AREA** to further zoom in on. Then select (from the examples) or write one **PRECISE TARGET** (bite-sized action) to coach your teacher on. You can choose to stick with the previous target if your teacher have not made enough progress yet.

How will you model the target to your teacher to show them what good looks like? What questions will you ask to check your teacher understands the model? For example, 'How it is different from your current practice?', 'What impact might it have on your practice and pupils?', 'What links can you see between the model and the module principles (below)?'

**Reminder: Your model should help your teacher develop their ability in some of the following:**

> Be aware of common misconceptions and discuss with experienced colleagues how to help pupils master important concepts.
> Plan formative assessment tasks linked to lesson objectives and think ahead about what would indicate understanding (e.g. by using diagnostic questions to pinpoint knowledge gaps, errors and misconceptions).
> Structure tasks and questions to enable the identification of knowledge gaps, errors and misconceptions.
> Prompt pupils to elaborate to check that a correct answer stems from secure understanding.
> Monitor pupil work during lessons, including checking for misconceptions.

Next, meet with your teacher to work through the 'Feedback' stage of instructional coaching. See the guidance on the feedback stage in the appendices of the Mentor Handbook for support.

**REFERENCES**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