

Formative Assessment Vignettes

Vignette 1

Your Thoughts

A high school biology teacher frequently reads aloud a prepared biology-related statement, then asks students to hold their hands under their chins and signify whether the statement is true or false by showing a “thumbs-up” for true or a “thumbs-down” for false. Depending on the number of students who respond incorrectly the teacher may have students present arguments for both sides, he may pair students and ask them to discuss the concept further, or he may decide that he needs to present the same concept using a different representation or instructional approach.

Vignette 2

Each student is given an appointment clock and is required to make an appointment with three other students for discussion later in the lesson. Once all the appointments have been made the teacher begins the lesson, providing information and posing questions that require higher-order thinking about the information. The students are asked to reflect on the information and to answer specific questions. Then the students go to their first appointment and spend approximately 15 minutes sharing their thinking as it relates to one or two of the posed questions. They analyze each other’s responses and come to consensus. As the students work with their partners, the teacher walks around and notes common misunderstandings and gaps in understanding. At the conclusion of the first appointment, the teacher uses the information gained during the informal observations to help redirect thinking, to reinforce ideas, and to provide cues that would help advance their learning. The students then go to their next appointment and class continues in this manner until all appointments have been met and all questions have been discussed.

Vignette 3

During a unit on photosynthesis, the teacher administers a weekly quiz that addresses all of the material covered for the week. The quizzes are supposed to motivate students to study for the summative unit as well as provide students with a sample of the types of questions they may encounter on the unit test.

Vignette 4

The teacher provides students with an open-ended question related to a concept they are studying and asks the students to identify the information or details necessary for a response to demonstrate full understanding of the concept. A list of these details is recorded on the board. The teacher then provides students with examples of several student responses that were given by students in previous years. The students are asked to analyze the responses and to determine if the responses show full understanding, partial understanding, or no understanding of the concept. Students must justify their answers. As this thinking is shared, the list of details or supports necessary for a response to the question is further refined until a set of criteria emerges that students can use to self-assess and peer-assess their responses to the question.

Vignette 5

District-developed monthly exams are to be administered to all students at the end of each of the school year's first eight months. The exams are based on state-authorized curricular goals for the grade and subjects involved. Because district administrators insist that teachers send results of these tests home to parents, all teachers do so. Yet, because the content covered by the monthly tests typically doesn't coincide with what is being taught at the time the tests are administered, teachers rarely alter their instruction based on students' performances on the monthly exams.