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What is my purpose?



Assessment Resource No 2

In [Assessment Resource No 1](#) we looked at a focus on assessment for learning (formative), and a way of designing assessment tasks for composing. In the model task students were asked to write a literary description to describe characteristic features of a place or setting. This may be the type of text found embedded within a broader narrative. The initial task was designed as it related to the focus in the upcoming teaching and learning program.

One of the greatest shifts to have occurred in educational assessment theory and practice in recent years is recognition that assessment is most effective when it is integrated with teaching and learning. (CESE, p5, 2015)

Assessing through the lens of text purpose

Once we have implemented a task that shows what students are able to achieve, it is important that we view their texts through a range of lenses in order to design or adapt teaching and learning to further develop not only their skills but also knowledge and understanding. In this resource, we will focus on the purpose of composing texts and how analysis of an assessment task can give us insights into designing teaching and learning.

As a response to the sample task in [Assessment Resource No 1](#), a student composed the following text as a draft. The student was also given the opportunity to plan before writing but declined to record any planning. This in itself is a teaching point.

At night the trees were blowing in the wind. There were eyes looking out of the trees. The trees were grey and brown with leaves coming off the branches. The leaves fell off the tree on to the ground. There were nice orange flowers on the bush. The trees in the bush were hugging each other like the wind does. Looking out from the bush was two red eyes to see if there were any black bats to go and catch to have for dinner.

It is clear that the student understands that the purpose of writing is to describe a setting, however, the student can be supported to develop a deeper understanding of purpose. This particular student was asked the purpose after completing her writing. She said it was to describe but was unable to elaborate any further. Often when students are asked about text purpose they can respond by saying: to entertain, to inform or to persuade, but they need further explicit teaching in terms of what this actually means from the perspective of both the reader and writer.

By looking more closely at the text in terms of it achieving its purpose, it can be seen that the reader is provided an entry into a world but development is needed in constructing the imagined setting to capture the reader's attention from the outset and motivate the reader to read on. Features are described, with some seeming relevant for a fantasy or mystery/horror genre but some features described may not be necessary, for example, the orange flowers. Even though a picture is created in the mind of the reader, much of the setting is described in an everyday rather than literary manner although there is an attempt at the use of figurative language but little extended description of features. The description of the red eyes possibly hints at what might come if the text was further developed.

Often we design and use criteria and rubrics which focus on text purpose and levels of achievement. As we assess and design learning, it is worth thinking deeply about what we mean by text purpose when teaching students. Once we have a clear, authentic context for composing, we can ask the following:

How is the writer wanting the reader to respond to or engage with the text?

What is the reader or audience wanting to get or achieve by engaging with the text?

When planning with colleagues it is worth asking these questions regardless of the purpose and then brainstorming responses as this informs conversations within the classroom.



At this point, it is important to state that texts with similar purposes can have very different features given their context and form. For example, descriptions may describe a setting in a narrative, a character in a poem, an animal in a report or a book in an online review. (See Humphrey, Droga & Feez, 2012). Given the various contexts each would have varying features.

In addition, in imaginative or literary texts, the actual type of literary genre will

play a role as what is important within a setting may differ if the setting is the basis for a fantasy rather than a narrative set in the real world (see McDonald, 2017). Looking through the lens of purpose and considering multiple possibilities for achieving the purpose, given the context, expands the tools and understanding of students. In the case of describing a setting that would be found embedded within a broader narrative, understanding the purpose of describing an imagined place could be developed by discussing the following features:

- the degree to which the attention of the reader is captured
- the level of engagement of the reader to begin being taken on a journey within the imagined setting
- the description of characteristic features of the setting that are important to the literary genre and upcoming events in the broader narrative
- the creation of a picture in the mind of the reader so that they are immersed in the setting
- the motivation of the reader to read on.

Designing teaching and learning based on assessment

As has been mentioned in relation to the work sample above, the student has described a setting but needs to develop more in-depth understanding of the purpose beyond just describing. She also opted out of planning and had limited responses when completing the [reflection sheet](#) after writing. This is valuable information for designing or modifying teaching and learning programs. The following strategies could be incorporated into teaching and learning programs based on needs identified in the initial assessment. Follow the links below to find teaching resources or visit the [resources page](#) of the website.



Understanding writers' purpose through reading

Read! Read! Read!!!

Read to students to expose them to a range of not only narrative texts where setting plays a crucial role but also a range of literary genres.

Text hunt

Provide pairs of students with a range of picture books and ask them to locate examples of descriptions of imagined settings before sharing with others. .

Book club

Ask students to locate a text from the class, school or local library or online and share in weekly book clubs.

Planning for writing: What's my purpose?

Planning for purpose

Provide questions or recording tables during joint construction to guide planning by focusing on identifying the context, purpose, literary genre and audience at the planning stage.

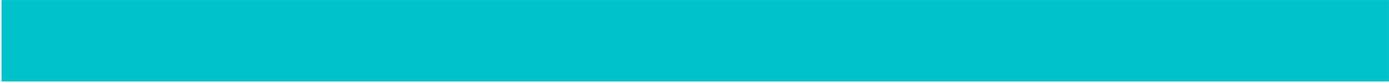
Planning with visual stimulus

Model how to unpack visual stimulus and make connections to characteristic features of a particular imagined setting.

Criteria for assessing the purpose of writing

Text comparison and criteria

Assess and compare a range of texts using criteria related to achieving the overall text purpose.



Further reading

Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation (2015) Re-assessing Assessment.

Humphrey, S Droga, L & Feez, S (2012) Grammar and meaning, 2nd Edition, NSW, Primary English Teachers' Association (PETAA).

McDonald, L (2017) A Literature Companion for Teachers 2nd Edition NSW, Primary English Teachers' Association (PETAA).