Early Education Program, Spring 2018  
Using Formative Assessment to Improve Student’s Learning of Lesson Plan Writing  
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This semester in the Early Childhood Language & Literacy II course we focused on the development of lesson plans. One of the assignments asked students to apply their learning about lesson plan writing to their fieldwork experiences by analyzing their fieldwork teacher’s literacy-related learning objectives and corresponding lesson plan.  Students were asked to identify common core standards that the teacher was addressing and to describe the lesson using prompts from a lesson plan template that I provided to them. The assignment ended up serving as a helpful formative assessment tool for me to identify what the students had gained from learning about lesson plan writing, and where they still needed to improve their understanding.  
More specifically, after reading their assignments, it became clear to me that that students needed more experience specifying details of a lesson plan.  The lesson plans were to include goals, objectives, essential questions, instructional approaches, and areas for differentiation. I suspected that students were having trouble understanding the importance of identifying the specific details of a lesson plan. I therefore had to find another way to reinforce the importance of doing so in my lesson. Thus, I decided to modify my original plan which appeared on the syllabus, and instead spend more time focusing on the importance of lesson plan specifics to help students clarify their lesson plan. The class was small, which enabled me to be flexible, and try out a new approach.  After sharing my observations about what I found in their assignments, I asked the students if we could together examine and analyze each of their lesson plans.  The students agreed to collaboratively examine each section of each other’s lesson plans to see if the lesson was clear and if the rationale behind each aspect of the lesson plan was apparent to the reader. I suggested to the students to imagine that the lesson plan was being read by a substitute teacher, who was teaching the class for the first time, and would need to know exactly what she was supposed to do to effectively carry out the lesson, and why. With that in mind, together we examined and analyzed in detail four lesson plans to prepare the student for the midterm assignment, which consisted of writing two additional lesson plans for different age groups of elementary school children.  Their midterms demonstrated their growth and understanding about the importance of creating objective and detailed lesson plans that correspond to specific measurable objectives.  For example, their midterms revealed their deeper thinking about specifics such as how to cater to diversity in the classroom including, English language learners, and differences in learning styles and abilities.

I was pleased that with formative assessment, I was not only able to identify areas where students needed more instructional support, but students were also able to collaboratively examine aspects of their own learning that needed improvement. As they examined their own work the students were able to engage in deeper understanding of the material. By asking them to look at their work and to unpack the lesson in greater detail, they incorporated what they had been taught about teaching and learning of literacy. The students began to take ownership over their learning process.  As a result, they are now in a place of deeper understanding about how teachers effectively plan lessons, and the importance of incorporating formative assessments into their own teaching practices.