

Assessment for Learning

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Assessment for learning (formative assessment), involves teachers and learners using assessment to improve learning. It is about assessing progress, analyzing and feeding back the outcomes of that assessment positively and constructively to:

- agree actions to help the learner improve
- adapt teaching methods to meet the learner's identified needs.

Assessment for learning follows on from an initial diagnostic assessment and continues throughout a learner's course or programme. It is also distinct from *assessment of learning*, nonetheless helps in the process of guiding learners towards accreditation.

What does *assessment for learning* involve?

Assessment for learning demonstrates a particular view of learning – that all learners can improve and achieve their full potential. Ability is incremental, not fixed.

Assessment for learning involves:

- sharing learning goals with learners – and making sure they know the standard or level they are aiming at.
- teacher and learner assessing progress through methods that include learner self-assessment and peer review (note that learners often need help to develop and use these skills well).
- teacher and learner together reviewing and reflecting on assessment information.
- giving feedback to learners in ways that enable them to improve and plan their next steps.

Assessment for learning is a continuous dialogue that should:

- focus on the whole person, taking into account feelings as well as skills, and understanding any barriers the learner may experience
- encourage learners to take more responsibility for their own learning
- ensure that learners are aware of what they are learning and why.

What experts tell us ?

Giving feedback on learning errors and getting the learner to correct them and identify strategies to improve future work is directly linked to significant improvement in achievement rates.

(Professor John Hattie, 2002)

To create a culture of success, where all learners believe they can achieve, teachers need to:

- make sure that learners are clear about:
- what they are meant to be doing how it will be assessed what they are doing well what is wrong and what needs to be done to put it right
- avoid reference to ability and competition and comparison with others.

(Black and Wiliam, 1999)

Feedback using constructive comments leads to improved performance – up by 33%. Marking using grades can have a negative effect on learner performance, particularly for low achievers.

(Butler, 1988)

Methods for assessment for learning Assessment for learning can take place in teaching and learning sessions, through written and verbal feedback and as part of review, target setting and action planning.

How can we check learning and assess progress?

When deciding on techniques for checking learning in a group situation, consider to what extent each method enables us:

- assess the progress of all learners
- ensure learners get constructive feedback
- get feedback on our teaching.

We should use a range of approaches:

- teacher-led assessment
- learner self-assessment
- peer assessment
- computer-based assessment.

These should be written into our course and session plans. Effective checking for learning enables learners to be involved in the assessment process and to make sense of what they are learning and how it relates to and builds on what they already know.

Developing the skill of reflection

For all learners, the ability to reflect on what they have experienced and learnt is important. It involves learners:

- describing an experience and how they felt about it
- reflecting on what they have learnt – or will be able to learn – from the experience
- developing skills of self-assessment.

Assessment for learning gives opportunities to support and guide the learner's reflection in a climate of mutual trust and respect.

Giving and receiving feedback

Giving constructive feedback – verbal and written – is a vital aspect of assessment for learning. We can provide feedback in a range of situations: from an instant, informal reply to a more formally planned review.

References:

Black, P and Wiliam, D (1999). *Assessment for learning: beyond the black box*. London: Kings College London. Professor John Hattie's website is at: www.arts.auckland.ac.nz/staff/index.cfm?p+8650

Butler, R (1988). 'Enhancing and undermining intrinsic motivation: effects of task-involving and ego-involving evaluation on interest and performance'. *British Journal of Educational Psychology* 56 (51–63).