Assessment for Learning

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The power of assessment

Unspeakably more depends *on what things are called* than on what they are ...creating new names and assessments and apparent truths is enough to create new ‘things’

_Friedrich Nietzsche, 1887_

The individual in contemporary society is not so much described by tests as constructed by them

_Allan Hanson, 1994_
The ‘double duty’ of assessment

‘Any assessment act must also contribute to learning beyond the immediate task... assessment that meets the needs of the present and prepares students to meet their own future needs.... Assessment activities should leave the students better equipped to tackle their next challenge, or minimally, no worse off than they would otherwise be’.

David Boud (2000)
Assessment: some definitions

• **Summative assessment** *(Assessment of Learning)*
  Assessment which ‘sums up’ where somebody has got in their learning. Often at the end of a course or topic

• **Formative assessment** *(Assessment for Learning)*
  Assessment which is used as part of the learning process. It ‘informs’ learning.
Assessment: some confusions

• *That formative assessment is only about testing.*

(USA test & remediate; ‘Formative assessment – the frequent assessments of student progress to identify learning needs and shape teaching’ (OECD 2005 p.13))

It includes many other forms of information-gathering (observation, oral work, misunderstandings, feedback). Most AfL does *not* involve testing.

It is about good teaching/pedagogy.
Assessment: some confusions (2)

That frequent classroom tests during a course are formative.

Unless they are directly used for further learning, they are better seen as frequent summative (‘mini-summative’) tests.
Assessment for Learning
(Formative Assessment)

Assessment for Learning is the process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners and their teachers to decide where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go and how best to get there.

Assessment Reform Group (2002)
Finding out where learners are

• Diagnostic assessment
  - listen to reading
  - classroom work
  - test information

• Questioning:
  – Misconceptions
  – Rich questions
  – Wait time
  – Traffic lights
Asking questions

• **Wait time** - Do we want our students to think?

‘Pair and share’ – using random pairs

Students asking questions (homework)

• **Using wrong answers** – the problem of protecting self-esteem (focus on task not person):

  “Error cannot be viewed solely as failure: rather, its source must be sought. In doing so the teacher demonstrates his respect for the child as a thinking being who has arrived at a response through reasons that may not correspond to the task, but which, nonetheless, exist and must be explored” (Feuerstein, 1980)

• **Traffic lights** – Checking whole class understandings
Knowing where learners need to go: The role of learning criteria and success criteria (1)

Clear learning intentions
- the teacher is clear about what is being learned (progression in learning)
- what we will be learning rather than what we will be doing
- ‘tuning in’ – setting the scene (why we are learning this), explaining the situation, linking to what is known, unfamiliar words & phrases explained
- cognitive challenge: a problem to be solved: ‘The teacher presents the pupils with a situation which they cannot tackle with their existing cognitive structure’

(UK Standards Site)
3. Find $x$.

Here it is
‘We ask kindergartners, “What is the sound of the letter at the end of the word?,” forgetting that many of them are unclear about the concepts *letter, word, sound* (as it applies to speech), and *end* (which requires knowing that letters are ordered left to right), and do not know that letters bear a complex relationship to speech sounds’. (P. Johnston)
Knowing where learners need to go: The role of learning criteria and standards (2)

Success criteria – understanding what is needed

- Royce Sadler’s paradox
  - negotiation
  - exemplars
  - modelling

The role of self and peer assessment
...and how best to get there.

Feedback

‘Provides information which allows the learner to close the gap between current and desired performance’

It is most effective when:

• It is effectively timed;
• It is clearly linked to the learning intention;
• The learner understands the success criteria/standard;
• It focuses on the TASK rather than the learner (self/ego);
• It gives cues at appropriate levels on how to bridge the gap: the task/process/self-regulation loop;
• It offers strategies rather than solutions;
• It challenges, requires action, and is achievable.
Validity and quality assessment

Validity is ‘the extent to which the evidence supports or refutes the proposed interpretations and uses’ of an assessment. (Michael Kane, 2006)

Threats to validity:
Construct under-representation
Construct irrelevance
Unreliability / lack of confidence in results
Misinterpretation of results / oversimplification / overgeneralisation
Validity challenges

Be clear about purpose(s)

Multiple purposes mean multiple validity enquiries

Keep interpretations and claims modest

Use summative assessments formatively if a purpose is to improve learning

Reliability is part of validity not a separate concept

*Dependability* as the optimal trade-off of validity and reliability
Dependability trade-offs

The one-handed clock

Figure 5.1 The one-handed clock.
Assessment that helps learning

Classroom assessment that aligns with effective learning:
- builds on what we know;
- makes meaning, ‘makes sense’;
- is active and social.

Summative assessment that focuses on validity so that:
- it is fit-for-purpose;
- the results are dependable;
- teaching to the test encourages better teaching.