

Action Learning Network – Assessment



[Downloadable PDF of our presentation to Forbairt, Ballinasloe October 2015](#)

Assessment for learning toolkit for staff

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**Assesment
for
Learning
(AFL)**

Recommended reading on AFL

source: *Teaching Council*

Inside the Black Box: Raising Standards through Classroom Assessment.

Key Words: cross sectoral, formative assessment, feedback and self-assessment.

Reference: Black, P. and Wiliam, D. (1998). Inside the Black Box: Raising Standards through Classroom Assessment. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 80 (2), 139-148.

While this article is almost two decades old, it is still as important and relevant today as it was at the time of print. Black and Wiliam outline a very convincing argument for increased focus on formative assessment and pupil self-assessment.

After conducting a wide review of the available literature and research evidence, the pair published this summary which provides both a persuasive argument for commitment to Assessment for Learning (AfL) at government policy level, but also gives key “do’s and don’ts” for teachers in the classroom. There is a clear acknowledgement that classroom context is important, that there is no quick-fix or magic-bullet solution, and that a teacher’s professional judgment plays a key role in any successful implementation of effective formative assessment.

Black and Wiliam encourage teachers to create a culture of success in their classrooms, backed by a belief that all students can achieve. They argue that pupils can only work with feedback that offers clear guidance which is not clouded with overtones of ability, competition or comparison.

Self-assessment is stated as a necessity for formative feedback, rather than a luxury. However, for self-assessment to be possible there needs to be a sufficiently clear picture, for pupils, of the targets that their learning is meant to attain. This article provides an interesting starting point for further reading on how we, individually and collectively, can improve learning in our classrooms with formative assessment.

[Teaching Council Priority Research Area: Pedagogy.](#)

Formative Assessment and the Learning and Teaching of MFL: Sharing the Language Learning Road Map with the Learners.

Key Words: post-primary, formative assessment, AfL and modern languages.

Reference: Black, P. and Jones, J. (2006). Formative assessment and the learning and teaching of MFL: sharing the language learning road map with the learners. *The Language Learning Journal*, 34 (1), 4-9.

This paper will be of interest to teachers looking for ways to use formative assessment in their language classroom. Formative assessment or assessment for learning (AfL) is a key concept in both the new Junior Cycle curriculum and in the teaching and learning pillar of School Self-Evaluation. Black and Jones define formative assessment as any assessment in which the first priority is to promote students' learning, as opposed to summative assessment where the priority is ranking or certifying competence.

The paper contains a number of concrete and useful suggestions as to how AfL can be integrated in the language classroom, including strategies around questioning skills, feedback, group work, peer-assessment and self-assessment. The authors also suggest ways in which AfL can be used to help students revise for summative assessments, such as end-of-year tests. The paper highlights how the use of AfL can contribute to students' understanding of how to learn a language and can help them progress towards becoming autonomous language learners.

[Teaching Council Priority Research Area: Pedagogy.](#)

An Instrument to Audit Teachers' Use of Assessment for Learning.

Key Words: teacher professional development, assessment audit instruments, assessment checklist, whole school evaluation, school self-assessment and Irish Context.

Reference: Lysaght, Z. and O'Leary, M. (2013). An Instrument to Audit Teachers' Use of Assessment for Learning. *Irish Educational Studies*, 32 (2), 217-232.

This paper describes the development of an assessment audit instrument or assessment checklist for teachers in Ireland. It is designed to help teachers evaluate their own understanding of assessment for learning. The audit instrument also helps teachers gauge the extent to which assessment practices are embedded in their teaching.

It consists of 58 statements about the use of four key assessment strategies. The strategies include sharing learning intentions and success criteria, questioning and classroom discussion, feedback and peer- and self-assessment.

This is an example of a statement about learning intentions: "Learning intentions are stated using words that emphasise knowledge, skills, concepts and/or attitudes, i.e., what the pupils are learning NOT what they are doing". The audit instrument statements help teachers in any setting visualise what assessment for learning should look like in the classroom. It can also help teachers assess and set targets for their own development in assessment for learning.

Teachers can use this research information to evaluate their own use of assessment during teaching on a minute-by-minute, day-by-day basis. The instrument can also be used to develop whole school practices in assessment for learning. It is very suited to target setting in the context of School Self Evaluation.

[Teaching Council Priority Research Area: Pedagogy.](#)

As part of our review of assessment in GCC throughout 2014/15 we are investigating current practices from both a teaching and learning perspective.

The principal ambitions of the project is to:

- Uncover, develop and encourage students and teachers to engage in best practice.
- Collaborate and share techniques of both formative and summative assessment which are effective in enhancing student outcomes.
- Develop a whole school strategy around the area of assessment.

To this end a small in-house team has been formed consisting of the Principal, Deputy Principal and two teacher leaders. Assistance and engagement will be provided through the Forbairt Programme and the PDST.



ALN project – Implementation of AfL strategies with a specific class group

Brief Description

Our project centered around the use of AfL techniques with a specific 2nd year class. The process involved project team meetings to identify a focus followed by a delivery to the whole staff on ALN and our involvement. As a reflective exercise on how we conduct and use assessment, each subject department was invited to outline to the teaching staff

practices which they employed and found useful. Subsequently a 2nd year class were chosen as a target group – inservice in AfL was provided for the teachers of this group, surveys of said teachers and of students in the group were carried out.

Identifying target area and area of need

We were agreed from the outset that we wanted to do something in the general area of assessment but as we discussed the matter it became apparent that we needed a much sharper focus. We were guided by the question – ‘how do our assessment strategies inform and improve the quality of student learning?’ Initially we were thinking in terms of house exams, class tests, homework, etc, with feedback in mind. It was this focus on feedback that led us to anchor the project in Assessment for Learning. We chose to focus on a specific group, a 2nd year class, and the teachers who taught them.

Data Gathering

- Surveys
- Student Cluster group and student copies
- Subject department meetings feedback

Analysis of Data

* a member of the project team facilitated subject dept feedback session with responses collated and categorised.

* Data from teacher questionnaire was collated and presented in bar/pie charts with results used to inform decisions re in service and focus of project.

* Student survey and analysis of student copies was used to establish the current position re student view of feedback, the extent and nature of feedback and value placed on it.

* Data from post implementation questionnaire for teachers and students analysed to establish change in practice, strategies

used and perceived effect.

Supports and Resources used

- * cluster meetings
- * on line google questionnaires
- * targeted survey
- * PDST in service from Anne O'Brien
- * NCCA website and information on AfL

Main challenges addressed

In a time of possible initiative overload we were anxious to progress this initiative without adding to teacher workload. We wanted to establish the potential in the project and to foster a positive attitude.

When first suggested, the issue of collecting student work with a view to analysing frequency and nature of feedback caused some concern. This was readily resolved.

Concerns of teachers in relation to whether our focus on Assessment was related to new Junior cycle and the issue of teacher assessment of their own students.

Alleviating subject specific concerns regarding the forms of assessment they use versus that of other subject areas. Reassuring teachers that the nature, quality and frequency of the forms of assessment they use was not being scrutinised but that student learning was the ongoing focus.

Engagement in the process has helped in moving towards a new understanding of teaching and learning as recognised by NCCa and others as central to the future of our education model.

Success of project in bringing about change

We wanted to reflect on how and with what effect we provide feedback to students on an ongoing basis. The data collected indicated that in many cases feedback was not provided and/or it was predominantly summative in nature.

Discussion at subject dept. level was effective in raising awareness of AfL. Anecdotal feedback on the session was overwhelmingly positive.

Teachers of the 2nd year cohort reported positively on their experiences in implementing AfL strategies. Students were less clear on noticing change in teaching style and/or use of feedback.

We feel there is scope to roll out further