

# LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING Ideas, Thinking and Dialogue for Growth and Attainment

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## Assessment for Learning What?

- Education as
  - *initiation* into knowledge, modes of thought, social mores and skills valued by society?
  - developing reflective thinking, hypothesising, problem solving, personal meaning?
  - the process of “becoming a person”?

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## Assessment for Learning What?

Overriding aim: enable young people to “Become Persons”

To achieve this they need  
intellectual sustenance  
skills in thinking and collaborative working.

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## Assessment for Learning What?

### Becoming a person

- Self-determination a key factor in learning and in relation to emotional and social influences
- A role of the teacher is that of counsellor - helping pupils to perceive what they can do and be.

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## Assessment for Learning What?

### Intellectual sustenance

- High expectation of ability to understand and think about significant ideas, real intellectual challenges in the subject areas studied
- For analysis, critique, comparison and incorporation in each pupil’s own fashion in her or his own set of values and constructs.

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## Assessment for Learning What?

### Thinking

- Understanding of new ideas and information in relation to what one already knows and in one’s “own words” (reflection)
- application of doubt, the questioning of assumptions and assertions, others’ and one’s own
- problems requiring decisions for which the correct basis is not obvious – decisions which involve grappling with and resolving one’s own uncertainty about, e.g., a practical or social problem, a commitment to a view or a policy, an interpretation of a text...

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## Assessment for Learning and Becoming a Person

Formative assessment: “assessment for development” rather than just “for learning”

- “Good learning” supports the acquisition of new psychological functions” (Black and Wiliam 2009, p. 19)
- Formative assessment contributes significantly to such development - quality of interactive feedback and reflection are critical features in learning activity
- It develops the orientations, reasoning abilities and confidence characteristic of independent and collaborative learning

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## Assessment for Learning Action

3 key actions

- Establishing where the learners are in their learning
- Establishing where they are going
- Establishing what needs to be done to get them there

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## Assessment for Learning Action

Clarifying and sharing learning intentions and criteria for success;

Engineering effective classroom discussions and other learning tasks that elicit evidence of student understanding;

Providing feedback that moves learners forward

Activating students as instructional resources for one another

Activating students as the owners of their own learning

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## Assessment for Learning Action

- Dialogue (pupil-teacher and pupil-pupil) - crucial means of challenging learners to reflect on their own thinking and to make unconscious learning processes overt, so that they can be considered, discussed and improved.
- The whole set of assessment for learning/formative assessment processes essentially comprise a sequence of three recurring activities:
  - stimulating learners to think about the topic
  - finding out, often through dialogue, what and how they are thinking
  - on the basis of this evidence, identifying with them next steps for more effective thinking and fuller, more certain grasp of what is being learned

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## Assessment for Learning Action

Original AfL strategies (contribute to the broader ones in previous slide)

- Sharing success criteria with learners
- Classroom questioning
- Comment-only marking
- Peer- and self-assessment
- Formative use of summative tests

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## Assessment for Learning Action

“Traffic lights”, “wait time”, “fat (ie, open) questions“, WALT (We Are Learning Today), 2 Stars and a Wish ... and similar “techniques”

*may* be means of engaging pupils in aspects of the necessary thinking, but they are not of themselves assessment for learning

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## Assessment for Learning Action

What is needed is really effective teaching of "intellectual sustenance" incorporating many/any kinds of activity that cause thinking and reflection

- "Any teacher using formative and interactive dialogue for normal subject teaching and feedback that encourages self-regulated learning (targeting one's own cognitions, affects and action) is engaged in a subject-specific form of thinking skills programme." (Black and Wiliam, 2009)
- She/he is helping young people to Become Persons.

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## Assessment for Learning Examples

Lynne (aged 7)  
Discussion showing

Limited concept of reading (just the "scheme")

No sense that it can be enjoyable or that you could learn from it

Embarrassment: "Ah, you can't read"

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## Assessment for Learning Examples

Lynne  
Action

Focus on attitude and motivation

Strategies to build confidence as a reader and to encourage a wider enjoyment of reading

Opportunities to read to younger children

Asking her to list all the "reading things" to do with at which she is good as a basis for a reading record of achievement

Introducing books beyond the reading scheme and encouraging her enjoyment of them by asking her to recommend books for younger children.

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## Assessment for Learning Examples

History with 12-13 year olds

- self and peer-evaluation of group presentations on researched topics
- process of learning as valuable as the subject content
- practical application of history skills in the research/presentations deepened understanding of the ideas and evidence and
- developed not only interest in history but personal confidence and collaborative learning skills
- controversial and therefore stimulating research topics
- agreed criteria for an effective presentation applied by class to each

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## Assessment for Learning Examples

History with 12-13 year olds

- Before application of agreed criteria, open-ended class discussion, asking the class to consider the strong and weak points of the presentation and emphasising the need to provide evidence for the evaluation - kept open the possibility that pupils might come up with insightful comment on their colleagues' work without the help of the relatively pre-determined 3-level criteria statements (which the teacher nevertheless considered important as "scaffolding" for pupils who were not yet used to making evaluative comments on one another's work).
- The teacher was SQA Principal Examiner at Higher Grade. He clearly did not take the view that pupils needed only narrow "exam preparation" to achieve good success in the examinations that he was setting.
- Early secondary history experiences led many pupils to choose the subject for continued study as they moved into the senior stages of the school.

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## Assessment for Learning Examples

Preparation for examinations

- Getting pupils to think out collaboratively how they would approach particular past examination mathematics questions, calling on mathematics knowledge covered in the course, working out the nature of the problem in the question and using the GRC to identify key requirements of the answer if it is to achieve a high grade.
- Engaging pupils in "jigsaw" co-operative learning, working in a group to ensure they had a full grasp of topics they and the teacher agreed were weak for them, then reporting to the rest of the class.
- Enabling pupils to access privately their own and their peers' English speaking assessment tasks on the teacher's blog, so that they could themselves assess them using the GRC without public embarrassment.

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## Assessment for Learning Examples

### Preparation for examinations

- “Reading market” in English classroom: different groups of pupils responsible for producing and explaining to others who came to their “stall” how to produce very good answers to particular literature questions, taking account of the GRC.
- Pupil groups produced their own marking schemes for summative assessment tasks they had taken in class - much learning discussion leading to an agreed class scheme, which they then used to assess their own and others’ work.
- Brainstorming approaches and pupils using GRC and the examiners’ published marking scheme in marking previous essays to develop discussion about the qualities of a very good discursive essay in French. (The teacher reported that 9 times out of ten the pupils became as accurate in marking others’ essays as she was herself.)

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## DOES IT WORK?

### Improving the quality of learning

- “I don’t think I’ll ever go back to being the kind of teacher I was before. And it just becomes part of you. Part of your teaching manner. And it didn’t happen overnight. It happened gradually, as you read material, as you saw what other people were doing, as you were listening to others, as you tried things. And I’d be prepared to say that some things worked and some things didn’t work. And maybe there were reasons for that. But the whole ethos of the system, I still think it’s of huge value and that’s the way we should be teaching. So I don’t want it to die. I mean, at my stage in life you could say, ‘Right, okay, four or five years to go, too late to change’. But never. These pupils are only in your room once.” (Secondary Teacher)
- Another secondary teacher, close to retirement, said with chagrin that he had only just learned to teach properly!

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## DOES IT WORK?

### Improving the quality of learning

- Significance of moving from “teaching” to “learning”.
- “It’s just the shift of emphasis from the teaching to the learning, you know.” (Primary Head Teacher)
- “It made me think how the pupil was thinking and get my mind into their mind and think...right, where is this pupil at? Why are they not understanding, while to me it’s crystal clear? How can I help them progress? How can I encourage them not to give up? How can I imagine I’m sitting in their seat listening to this guy?” Secondary Teacher

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## DOES IT WORK?

### Improving the quality of learning

- Impact on self-esteem, engagement, and attainment
- “Confidence grows. They would never go back. There’s a wee boy working out there who had learning difficulties...he needed support in language. He’s on the star pupil board. You wouldn’t believe what he can write. And that’s all with his new self-esteem. That’s all starting out with just a few words, saying, ‘That’s brilliant.’” (Primary Teacher)

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## DOES IT WORK?

### Attainment

- Black and Wiliam (1998b) - over 250 studies linking assessment and learning
- Clear and incontrovertible evidence that initiatives to enhancing effectiveness of the way assessment is used in the classroom to promote learning can raise pupil achievement

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## DOES IT WORK?

### Attainment

- Scale of the effect equivalent for an individual of between one and two grades in a GCSE examination at age 16
- Attention to formative assessment throughout the country would have raised England’s position in the TIMMS from the middle of the 41 to the top five
- Evidence that the gain was likely to be even more substantial for lower-achieving pupils

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## DOES IT WORK?

### Attainment

- Scottish E A co-ordinators identified impact on attainment as measured in national tests and other summative assessments

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## DOES IT WORK?

### Attainment - Highland Council formative use of exam criteria

- Pedagogical changes (group work, pupil-pupil dialogue, peer - and self-evaluation, creative thinking, dialogue) led to reflection, peer- and self-assessment, pupil autonomy and understanding – valued by their teachers
- “My exam results have improved over the last few years ... but more than the results, it’s just being in the classroom and seeing the engagement of the pupils.”
- Unwilling to be over-optimistic in predicting exam performance
- “How did the pupils do?”
  - Almost unanimous response — excellent results

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## MAKING IT WORK

### Problems with previous Scottish model

- Research-informed assessment *policy* only
- Impact of the wider policy context of performativity and multiple, parallel local and national policy initiatives
- Relationship among research, policy and practice oversimplified

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## MAKING IT WORK

### Problems with previous Scottish model

- Factors that get impede effective assessment for learning remained prominent:
  - tendency to assess quantity of work and presentation rather than the quality of learning
  - too much attention to marks/grades (much of it tending to lower pupils’ self-esteem) rather than to providing advice for improvement – in reality the national tests became almost the sole means of assessment
  - strong emphasis on comparing pupils with each other (demoralises the less successful learners)
  - feedback to pupils often served social and managerial purposes, rather than helping them to learn more effectively
  - teachers did not know enough about their pupils’ learning needs.

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## MAKING IT WORK

### Success factors in AifL formative assessment

- Educational integrity
- Personal and professional integrity
- Systemic integrity

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## MAKING IT WORK

### Success factors in AifL formative assessment

- Recognising and working through complexity
  - educational integrity, what matters for learning (itself a complex idea) and actual improvement of learning occurring
  - ensuring depth of understanding about what really matters – and implications for the roles of teaching, research and policy communities
  - personal conviction on the part of teachers, researchers and policymakers and their full professional participation in deciding action to take the development forward
  - openness, equality, sharing of issues, problems, solutions and professional expertise across all the communities involved
  - effective interaction and sharing, networking in teacher groups in school and the wider peer group
  - consistent policy and advice from policy and research
  - deep understanding of learning and teaching principles and of the nature of participative learning and an awareness of different community priorities
  - recognition that the change process is ultimately personal
  - full attention to all these important interacting factors and avoidance of over-simplified strategies

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## MAKING IT WORK

Success factors in AifL formative assessment

- No 'pilot' and 'roll out' or 'cascade'
- Things that matter in the process of real change need to be fully worked through by all participants, whether an individual or a school is in the first phase of the development or the last

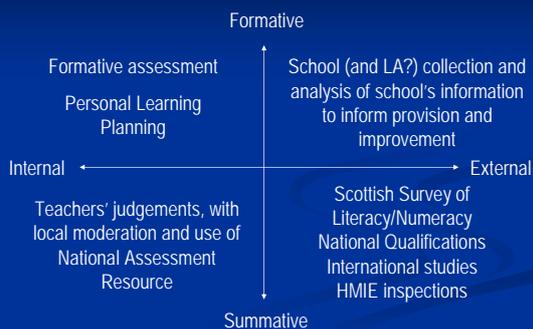
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## "Evaluating Schools, Assessing Pupils"

- Biggest challenge is in conference title – how get evaluative evidence about learning which does not have negative washback on learning?
- Well-intentioned political concern to compare schools often narrows and impoverishes learning, because of focus on the "testable".
- In any case, much test/exam evidence is flawed/limited, though accepted as valid and reliable in "accountability" info-gathering

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## AifL in a coherent national system of assessment



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## AifL in a coherent national system of assessment

To achieve a coherent system that fully promotes learning – becoming a person – we need:

- Development of teachers' commitment and skills on the left side of the quadrant
- Policy commitment (national and EA) to all the elements on the right side in ways that
  - ensure external assessments that validly assess what matter and do not promote narrow exam-oriented teaching
  - take account of a wide range of characteristics of a school, an EA and the whole Scottish educational system, not only exam results, in evaluating their success

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