

Assessment For Learning

In classrooms where **assessment for learning**, commonly called **formative assessment**, is practised, students are encouraged to be more active in their learning and associated assessment. The ultimate purpose of assessment for learning is to create self-regulated learners who can leave school able and confident to continue learning throughout their lives. Teachers need to know at the outset of a unit of study where their students are in terms of their learning and then continually check on how they are progressing through strengthening the feedback they get from their learners. Students are guided on what they are expected to learn and what quality work looks like. The teacher will work with the student to understand and identify any gaps or misconceptions (initial/diagnostic **assessment**). As the unit progresses, the teacher and student work together to assess the student's knowledge, what she or he needs to learn to improve and extend this knowledge, and how the student can best get to that point (**formative assessment**). Assessment for learning occurs at all stages of the learning process.

In past decades, teachers would design a unit of study that would typically include objectives, teaching strategies, and resources. The student's mark on this test or exam was taken as the indicator of his or her understanding of the topic. In 1998, Black & William produced a review that highlighted that students who learn in a formative way achieve significantly better than matched control groups receiving normal teaching. Their seminal work developed into several important research projects on Assessment for Learning by the King's College team including Kings-Medway-Oxfordshire Formative Assessment Project (KMOFAP), Assessment is For learning (Scotland), Jersey-Actioning-Formative assessment (Channel Islands), and smaller projects in England, Wales, Peru, and the USA.

Definitions

There are a number of assessment terms that will appear in any discussion of assessment. Listed below are common interpretations of some of these terms:

Assessment

The term 'assessment' refers to all those activities undertaken, by teachers, and by their students in assessing themselves, which provide information to be used as feedback to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged.

Assessment for learning

comprises two phases—initial or diagnostic assessment and formative assessment

assessment can be based on a variety of information sources (e.g., portfolios, works in progress, teacher observation, conversation)

verbal or written feedback to the student is primarily descriptive and emphasizes strengths, identifies challenges, and points to the next steps

as teachers check on the understanding they adjust their instruction to keep students on track

no grades or scores are given - record-keeping is primarily anecdotal and descriptive

occurs throughout the learning process, from the outset of the course of study to the time of summative assessment

Assessment as learning

begins as students become aware of the goals of instruction and the criteria for performance

involves goal-setting, monitoring progress, and reflecting on results

implies student ownership and responsibility for moving his or her thinking forward (metacognition)

occurs throughout the learning process

Assessment of learning

assessment that is accompanied by a number or letter grade (summative)

compares one student's achievement with standards

results can be communicated to the student and parents

occurs at the end of the learning unit

Evaluation

judgement made on the basis of a student's performance

Diagnostic assessment ("pre-assessment")

the assessment made to determine what a student does and does not know about a topic

the assessment made to determine a student's learning style or preferences

used to determine how well a student can perform a certain set of skills related to a particular subject or group of subjects

occurs at the beginning of a unit of study

used to inform instruction:makes up the initial phase of assessment for learning

Formative assessment

the assessment made to determine a student's knowledge and skills, including learning gaps as they progress through a unit of study

used to inform instruction and guide learning

occurs during the course of a unit of study

makes up the subsequent phase of assessment for learning

Summative assessment

the assessment that is made at the end of a unit of study to determine the level of understanding the student has achieved

includes a mark or grade against an expected standard

Principles

The big 5 principles of assessment for learning are

1. The provision of effective feedback to students.
2. The active involvement of students in their own learning.
3. Adjusting teaching to take account of the results of the assessment.
4. Recognition of the profound influence assessment has on the motivation and self-esteem of pupils, both of which are critical influences on learning.
5. The need for students to be able to assess themselves and understand how to improve.

In the United States, the [Assessment For Learning Project](#) has identified four "core shifts" and ten "emerging principles" of assessment for learning.

Core Shifts

1. Purpose of Assessment: From exposing inequity to enacting equity
2. Process of Assessment: From an isolated event to an integrated process
3. Priorities of Assessment: From evaluating students to encouraging reflection and feedback
4. Product of Assessment: From averages and scores to bodies of evidence of learning

Emerging Principles

1. Meaningful Tasks, Worthy Evidence, and Authentic Validation
2. Coherence Among Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment
3. Clear and Transparent Learning Targets
4. Accessible and Inclusive Design for All Learners
5. Active Student Participation with Structured Reflection
6. Specific, Actionable Feedback
7. Support of Positive Mindsets and Identities
8. Community-engaged Readiness Definitions
9. Professional Expertise, Collaboration, and Calibration

10. Systems of Assessments Designed from the Student

The purpose of an Assessment for Learning (AFL) task is to provide feedback to both the teacher and learner regarding the learner's progress towards achieving the learning objective(s). This feedback should be used by the teacher to revise and develop further instruction. An effective AFL method is to use a performance task coupled with a [rubric](#). This type of assessment is fundamental in illustrating how and why such principles need to be adhered to.