

Assessment for Learning in the primary classroom: practical ideas

Adrienn Szlapak

Formative assessment strategies (adapted from William & Thompson, 2007)

	Where is the learning going?	Where is the learner?	How to get where we need to?
Teacher	1. Clarifying, understanding and sharing learning intentions	2. Engineering effective classroom discussions, tasks and activities that elicit evidence of learning	3. Providing feedback that moves learners forward
Peer		4. Activating students as learning resources for one another	
Learner		5. Activating students as owners of their own learning	

Practical ideas for implementing Assessment for Learning

1. Learning intentions: it is essential that the teacher and the learners are clear about the learning intentions. To maximise engagement, learning objectives do not always have to be shared at the start of the lesson.
 - Set up an appropriate lead-in activity before eliciting the learning objective from your students. For instance, if the learning objective is to discuss their last holiday with their families, you can start the lesson by showing photos of your own holiday, letting them guess where you went and what you did. Answer any questions they might have before asking them to guess the learning objective.
 - Give a gapped version of the learning objective early in the lesson and tell your learners that you will want them to be able to complete the gaps by the end of the lesson. This way you can easily tie the different lesson stages together and even use it as a reflection task or exit ticket at the end. The learners are bound to be motivated to stay on track to be able to crack the puzzle.

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2. Targeted questioning: To find out what our students know and have learnt, we need to ask them questions. There are a few things to consider:
 - Give ample time for your learners to process the question, think about their response, process the language they need to respond before expecting them to say anything.
 - Ask concept checking questions to find out whether your learners understand the topic at hand.
 - Use 'might' to elicit how to get to the next stage, e.g. So how might you correct that mistake? What might you do next? What might you need to succeed?
 - Encourage your learners to extend their answers by asking them to justify their answers. This can be as simple as asking them 'why' after their response.
 - Avoid putting your learners on the spot. Don't target learners individually unless you are 100% certain they will be able to give you an answer. Instead, you could ask them to write their response on a whiteboard and hold it up towards you. That way, you can see everyone's responses without singling anybody out.
 3. Statements: sometimes statements are more helpful at generating effective classroom discussions than questions because they encourage learners to analyse and evaluate the statement and apply their knowledge. They are more likely to give longer and deeper answers than just by asking them questions. For instance, instead of asking them what makes somebody a good friend, you can give the following statement: "Good friends never lie," and see how they respond.
 4. Traffic lights: This formative assessment tool allows learners to self-reflect, while providing valuable feedback to the teacher. Here is how to do it:
 - Give your learners a set of colourful cards. Green stands for feeling confident, yellow stands for needing some support, and red stands for needing immediate support with the task at hand.
 - At different stages of an activity ask your learners to choose a colour that best represents how they feel in the moment. Ask them to hold it up for you to see.
 - Once you have seen everybody's card, you will know who needs your immediate support and who you can pair up for appropriate peer support.
 5. Gestures and smiley faces: similarly to the previous idea, gestures and smiley faces can be used to get feedback from learners in the lesson. Asking them to show a thumbs up or a thumbs down or to draw an appropriate emoji on a mini whiteboard or a piece of paper.
 6. Can-do statements: many modern coursebooks use this strategy to teach learners to self-reflect. Here is an example:
 - Learning objective: By the end of the lesson, learners will be better able to use the present simple to talk about their daily routines.
 - Can-do statements:
 - I can use present simple verbs to make sentences about my daily routine.
 - I can use present simple questions to ask about somebody else's daily routine.
 7. Dealing with mistakes: mistakes are part and parcel of learning. We can learn a lot from them as learners and even more as teachers. Try to:

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- Elicit reasons for correct and incorrect answers, especially if done before the correct answer is revealed. This often leads to highly useful conversations that tell teachers a lot about where things might have gone wrong or what needs to be clarified.
 - Teach your learners that mistakes are good to build their motivation and confidence.
 - Remember not to single out individual learners' mistakes.
 - Allow time and space for learners to act on the correction.
8. Success criteria: assessment criteria, rubrics and checklists can provide learners information about what is expected and they can be referred to during and after the task as well.
- The words of the success criteria should be age and level appropriate.
 - Learners need to be trained to use these successfully.
 - Older learners can be involved in the construction of the success criteria to ensure that they are fully aware of the expectations.
 - Learners should use the success criteria for peer assessment before the final submission.
9. Comment only marking: grades and scores might be scary for your learners; moreover, learners might be too focused on the number to make use of the feedback.
- Good feedback is forward looking and gives learners information about how to improve. Avoid using 'could have', 'should have', and 'would have' in your comments.
 - There needs to be time and space for learners to attempt the task again based on the feedback.
10. Two stars and a wish: this peer assessment activity teaches learners to give each other valuable feedback.
- Ask learners to look at somebody else's work and find two things they like about it.
 - Now they need to find one thing the person could improve and phrase it as a wish.
 - E.g. You used the past simple correctly and you started each sentence with a capital letter. I wish you could add full stops to the end of all of your sentences.