

Assessment for Learning

A toolkit for teacher development



Assessment for Learning



Copyright: Matt Wright

These materials provide an overview of Assessment for Learning (AfL) and its use in English language teaching. In this module we discuss how assessment can be used to support the learning process.

This module is aimed at:

- teachers of English as a foreign language
- in-service teachers.

Overview

- This session is an introduction to Assessment for Learning. It will help you to develop your knowledge of the principles of Assessment for Learning and also provide an overview of practical strategies which can be used in language learning classrooms.
- It assumes little or no current knowledge of Assessment for Learning.

Learning objectives

By the end of this module you will have developed:

- an understanding of the key principles of Assessment for Learning in effective teaching and learning
- an awareness of a range of strategies for Assessment for Learning.



Copyright: Matt Wright

Experiences of assessment



Copyright: Matt Wright

- Teachers often talk about ‘teaching to the test’.
- What do you understand by this term? Make a note of your thoughts and then compare them with the definition on the next page.

Teaching to the test: Definition

‘Both teachers and parents have expressed concerns that the growing pressures exerted by national regimes of testing and examinations are leading teachers to focus too narrowly on the knowledge necessary to enable learners to pass the test, rather than developing in them an understanding of the subject and its context within the wider field of knowledge. Teaching in this way has become known as ‘teaching to the test’.

(Wallace, 2009)



Copyright: Matt Wright

Teaching to the test

- Think about the implications of teaching to the test.
- Note down the impact it can have on:
 - a) teachers
 - b) students.



Copyright: Matt Wright

Commentary (1)

- In an attempt to ‘cover’ the examination syllabus teachers may limit the content of teaching sessions in order to focus mainly or solely on what will be assessed and so prevent students understanding the subject within a broader context.
- Concentration on word or sentence level linguistic features: teaching to the test often promotes rote learning of discrete items and therefore is less likely to focus on discoursal aspects of English.

Commentary (2)

- Emphasis on extrinsic motivation – focusing on tests may appeal to students who have high levels of extrinsic motivation and wish to gain a qualification in order to further their academic or professional goals, but is much less likely to motivate students who are learning English for personal enjoyment or those who are disengaged with the learning process.

Commentary (3)

- Exam-focussed sessions are often teacher- rather than student-centred and feature a heavy reliance on textbooks.
- In teacher-centred classrooms students are less likely to collaborate with other students, and therefore have fewer chances to develop their communication skills.
- In addition to this, students are more likely to depend on the teacher for input, rather than directing their own learning and acting more autonomously.
- Over-use of coursebooks restricts the contextualisation of language to topics which are included in the coursebook, rather than those which are most likely to relate to students' needs and wants.

Commentary (4)

- Students may become impatient with material which is not examination practice. This creates more pressure on the teacher to limit the session content to exam-focused work.



Copyright: Matt Wright

Classroom based assessment

- In the following materials you will learn about how teachers can engage more effectively with assessment in their classrooms and use this to promote high quality learning experiences for their students rather than just ‘teaching to the test’.
- Think about your own experiences of assessing students.
 - What type of assessments have you used?
 - To what extent did the assessments help students’ learning?



Copyright: Matt Wright

Assessment in the classroom

[Listen](#) to Kathryn Hill talking about classroom based assessment.

Answer the following questions.

1. Why is Black and Wiliam's paper 'Inside the Black Box' so important?
2. What is the difference between summative and formative assessment?
3. What is the importance of Assessment for Learning in language teaching?

Commentary question 1

Why is Black and Wiliam's paper 'Inside the Black Box' so important?

- In *Inside the black box*, Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam reviewed and summarized the main findings from a major literature review of over 250 articles related to assessment.
- They found compelling evidence that 'formative assessment' could improve learning. Their publication, [*Inside the Black Box*](#), was a guide for teachers focusing on using formative assessment to improve learning.



Copyright: Matt Wright

Commentary question 2

What is the difference between summative and formative assessment?

- Summative assessment is often described as ‘assessment *of* learning’ where the goal is to evaluate students’ learning at the end of a particular period of study, e.g. the end of a project, or school year.
- This kind of assessment is used to determine what students have learned and thus report on their progress.



Copyright: Matt Wright

Commentary continued

- Formative assessments are used not as a final evaluation, but as part of an *ongoing* process of assessment. The goal is to monitor student learning and provide feedback that can be used by teachers and students to improve their learning.
- It is characterised therefore as 'Assessment ***for*** Learning'. This can help teachers and students to identify their strengths and areas for improvement.



Copyright: Matt Wright

Commentary question 3

What is the importance of Assessment for Learning in language teaching?



The goal of Assessment for Learning is improvement and it allows both teachers and students to identify areas for improvement and target their efforts accordingly.

Assessment for Learning?

Look at the assessment practices below. Are they examples of 'assessment *OF* learning' or 'assessment *FOR* learning'?

state or national exam

in-class Q&A

end of chapter test

self assessment

quizzes

peer assessment

detailed comments on a piece of written homework

Assessment

Formative

- In-class Q&A
- Peer assessment
- Self assessment
- Quizzes
- Detailed comments on a piece of homework

Summative

- National or state test
- End of chapter test

Defining Assessment for Learning

Assessment for Learning can, therefore, be defined as:

“.....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



The benefits of assessment for learning

- What are the benefits of assessment for learning? Take a few minutes to think about this and make notes.
- Now [listen](#) to an English teacher talking about the benefits of Assessment for Learning.
- Compare your answers.



Commentary

Some of the benefits of Assessment for Learning:

- It can be used to identify where students are in their learning and what they need to improve.
- It is central to classroom practice.
- It is a key professional skill.
- It is part of effective planning – teachers who understand their students' needs can better plan how to help them.



Copyright: Matt Wright

Commentary continued

Assessment for Learning:

- is sensitive and constructive
- recognises all educational achievement
- fosters motivation
- promotes understanding of goals and criteria.



Copyright: Matt Wright

10 principles of Assessment for Learning

- The Assessment Reform Group lists 10 guiding principles which reflect the most important characteristics of Assessment for Learning. You can find them [here](#).
- Look at the 10 principles.
- To what extent do you think the principles are likely to promote learning? How could you use them in your own teaching?

AfL – practical strategies

- You are now going to look at a range of practical techniques that teachers can use to promote assessment for learning. They are:
 - questioning techniques
 - giving effective feedback
 - informal classroom assessment techniques.

Questioning techniques



Copyright: Matt Wright

Think about how you use questions in your teaching.

Make a note of your answers.

- How can asking students questions help students to learn?
- What different types of questions are there?
- How might they be used?

Commentary (1)

Questions can:

- help both teachers and students to ascertain what they do and don't understand
- encourage students to recall what they have learned previously and stimulate further thinking
- challenge students to think more independently and creatively
- help them to make links between different concepts
- encourage students to evaluate their own work and to think about alternatives
- help students to reflect on their own understanding, by listening to others' answers to questions.

Commentary (2)

Closed questions can be useful when:

- there is an easy, fixed answer
- a student lacks confidence or is weak.

Open questions can be useful when:

- we want to encourage learners to expand on their answers and encourage them to extend both their thinking and the range of language they use.

Giving feedback

The next slides focus on effective strategies for giving feedback.

- Feedback is the way that we provide information to a student which focuses on their performance.
- Effective feedback helps students to understand what they have done well, and what they need to do to improve their work.



Copyright: Matt Wright

What makes effective feedback?

Good feedback should:

- focus on the task and successful task completion
- be positive about the current performance
- make the learner aware of specific actions to take to improve performance.



Copyright: Matt Wright

It is important to give feedback the learner can process and use effectively in the next stage of learning.

What makes effective feedback?(2)

When giving feedback teachers should:

- give feedback at an appropriate time
- give time for the learner to contemplate and understand the feedback
- check the learner has understood the feedback and what they have to do to improve.

Giving feedback: Practical task

Look at two pieces of [written work](#) which have been marked by a teacher.

- What is the difference in feedback strategies used by each teacher?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of each?

Commentary

Student A

- High number of corrections.
- No written, qualitative feedback.
- No guidance on how to improve.



Copyright: Matt Wright

Student B

- Some corrections but some errors are just highlighted, allowing learners to think about the mistake themselves.
- Detailed written comments explain what the student has done well, and how the work can be improved.
- Teacher comments on the extent to which the task has been completed.

Assessment for learning: practical examples

- There are many different ways of assessing students' learning in a classroom. In the next slides we describe some quick Assessment for Learning techniques which can be used in the classroom.



Copyright: Matt Wright

AfL: Practical techniques

Choose a technique to find out more:

Two stars
and a wish

Plus, minus,
what's next?

Traffic lights

Strategic
questioning

Thumbs up,
down,
middle

Student
conference

Warm and
cool
feedback

Tickled pink
and green
for growth

Students
write the test

Two stars and a wish

- Give two pieces of positive feedback and one piece of feedback on an aspect of the work which could be improved.
- This technique can be used by the teacher or for peer assessment. It should be modelled by the teacher before being used for peer assessment.

[Return](#) to the list of AfL practical techniques.

Plus, minus, what's next

- Students comment on what has been done well in a piece of work and what could be done better.
- This technique is a development of three stars and a wish and can be used when students are practised peer-assessors.

[Return](#) to the list of AfL practical techniques.

Traffic Lights

- Students use a green-light (for example, a piece of green paper) to indicate work they are happy with. An amber-light is used to indicate work which requires improvement. A student uses a red-light to show when they are having difficulties understanding the task.
- Traffic lights can be used for self- or peer-assessment. The traffic lights can be placed on every desk and the student points to the appropriate colour. Or they can use highlighter pens on written text.

[Return](#) to the list of AfL practical techniques.

Strategic questioning

- These questions provide teachers with the opportunity to identify and correct misunderstandings or gaps in knowledge. These questions need to be prepared ahead of the lesson.

[Return](#) to the list of AfL practical techniques.

Thumbs up, thumbs down, thumbs middle

- The teacher asks the group to indicate their level of confidence on a topic by holding thumbs up if they feel confident or thumbs down if they feel unconfident.
- If the students have limited confidence they hold their thumbs in the middle.
- The teacher then asks questions to discover the reasons behind any thumbs down or in the middle.
- When students are all feeling confident the teacher can move to the next stage of the lesson.

[Return](#) to the list of AfL practical techniques.

Warm and cool feedback

- When students provide positive comments on a piece of work they are providing warm feedback.
- When they are identifying areas which need improvement they are giving cool feedback.
- The students suggest ways to raise the temperature by giving ideas to improve the piece of work.

[Return](#) to the list of AfL practical techniques.

Student conference

- Students present their learning to the teacher and reflect on their progress. These conferences are usually based on a portfolio of student work. The students should set clear goals for future learning.

[Return](#) to the list of AfL practical techniques.

Tickled pink and green for growth

- Here you and the class can look at a piece of work (perhaps from another class) and jointly identify two aspects of the work where the author successfully met the success criteria. These are then highlighted in pink.
- Everyone then agrees one aspect of the work that offers the most scope for improvement (this won't always be the worst part of the work), and this is then highlighted in green.
- Finally, the class comes up with a prompt suggesting how the author could improve that part of their work.

[Return](#) to the list of AfL practical techniques.

Students write the test

- Designing an entire test involves more learning than responding to a teacher-generated test or completing a mock exam.
- Students learn how different question formats require them to display different types of knowledge and skill.

[Return](#) to the list of AfL practical techniques.

Observation task

You have read and heard about a range of ways that teachers can use assessment to help the learning process.

- If you are in the UK, you can watch the following [programme](#) which shows a teacher working with a class of primary school learners.
- As you watch, note down as many Assessment for Learning techniques as you can.
- Check your answers on the next slide.



Copyright: Matt Wright

Observation task: Suggested answers

- sharing learning intentions with pupils.
- sharing and negotiating success criteria with students
- opportunities effective questioning
- opportunities for feedback from pupils
- peer assessment
- self assessment
- traffic lights
- think, pair, share
- tickled pink and green for growth
- two stars and a wish

Reflective task



Copyright: Matt Wright

Think about the different aspects of Assessment for Learning which you have learned about in this module.

- What could you do to promote AfL with your learners?
- Make a short action plan of 4-5 points which you can introduce into your own teaching.

What next?



Copyright: Matt Wright

You have now finished these materials on Assessment for Learning. We hope you have found them useful and enjoyable. If you are interested in learning more about assessment, please look at our other materials on:

- Assessing level and CEFR
- Assessing Young Learners
- Language Assessment for Teachers
- Assessment Resources

References

University of
HUDDERSFIELD

Assessment Reform Group 2002, *Assessment for Learning: 10 principles research-based principles to guide classroom practice*, Assessment Reform Group, London, United Kingdom.

Wallace, S. (Ed.) (2009). *A Dictionary of Education*. Oxford: Oxford University Press