Assessment for Learning: 10 principles

Research-based principles to guide classroom practice

Assessment Reform Group

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Assessment for Learning is 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 for learning should be recognised as central to classroom practice

Much of what teachers and learners do in classrooms can be described as assessment. That is, tasks and questions prompt learners to demonstrate their knowledge, understanding and skills. What learners say and do is then observed and interpreted, and judgements are made about how learning can be improved. These assessment processes are an essential part of everyday classroom practice and involve both teachers and learners in reflection, dialogue and decision making.

Assessment for learning should focus on how students learn

The process of learning has to be in the minds of both learner and teacher when assessment is planned and when the evidence is interpreted. Learners should become as aware of the 'how' of their learning as they are of the 'what'.

Assessment for learning should be part of effective planning of teaching and learning

A teacher's planning should provide opportunities for both learner and teacher to obtain and use information about progress towards learning goals. It also has to be flexible to respond to initial and emerging ideas and skills. Planning should include strategies to ensure that learners understand the goals they are pursuing and the criteria that will be applied in assessing their work. How learners will receive feedback, how they will take part in assessing their learning and how they will be helped to make further progress should also be planned.

Assessment for learning should be regarded as a key professional skill for teachers

Teachers require the professional knowledge and skills to: plan for assessment; observe learning; analyse and interpret evidence of learning; give feedback to learners and support learners in self-assessment. Teachers should be supported in developing these skills through initial and continuing professional development.

Assessment for learning should be sensitive and constructive because any assessment has an emotional impact

Teachers should be aware of the impact that comments, marks and grades can have on learners' confidence and enthusiasm and should be as constructive as possible in the feedback that they give. Comments that focus on the work rather than the person are more constructive for both learning and motivation.

Assessment should take account of the importance of learner motivation

Assessment that encourages learning fosters motivation by emphasising progress and achievement rather than failure. Comparison with others who have been more successful is unlikely to motivate learners. It can also lead to their withdrawing from the learning process in areas where they have been made to feel they are 'no good'. Motivation can be preserved and enhanced by assessment methods which protect the learner's autonomy, provide some choice and constructive feedback, and create opportunity for self-direction.

Assessment for learning should promote commitment to learning goals and a shared understanding of the criteria by which they are assessed

For effective learning to take place learners need to understand what it is they are trying to achieve - and want to achieve it. Understanding and commitment follows when learners have some part in deciding goals and identifying criteria for assessing progress. Communicating assessment criteria involves discussing them with learners using terms that they can understand, providing examples of how the criteria can be met in practice and engaging learners in peer- and self-assessment.

Learners should receive constructive guidance about how to improve

Learners need information and guidance in order to plan the next steps in their learning. Teachers should: pinpoint the learner's strengths and advise on how to develop them; be clear and constructive about any weaknesses and how they might be addressed; provide opportunities for learners to improve upon their work.

Assessment for learning develops learners' capacity for self-assessment so that they can become reflective and self-managing

Independent learners have the ability to seek out and gain new skills, new knowledge and new understandings. They are able to engage in self-reflection and to identify the next steps in their learning. Teachers should equip learners with the desire and the capacity to take charge of their learning through developing the skills of self-assessment.

Assessment for learning should recognise the full range of achievements of all learners

Assessment for learning should be used to enhance all learners' opportunities to learn in all areas of educational activity. It should enable all learners to achieve their best and to have their efforts recognised.

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Research-based principles of assessment for learning to guide classroom practice

Assessment for Learning

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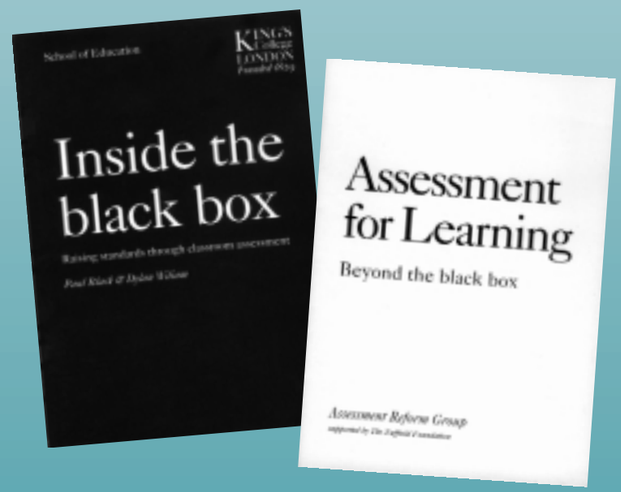
Assessment *for* learning is one of the most important purposes of assessment. It is not the only purpose and is to be distinguished from assessment *of* learning, which is carried out for the purposes of grading and reporting (ARG, 1999). A review of research into classroom assessment (Black and Wiliam, 1998) has shown that assessment for learning is one of the most powerful ways of improving learning and raising standards. Current research is adding further evidence in support of this claim and the empirical evidence is underpinned by theory from the psychology of learning and studies of learning motivation.

While assessment of learning has well established procedures, assessment for learning requires some theoretical ideas to be put into practice if the potential benefits are to be gained. In doing this, it is important to follow certain guiding principles which reflect the essential features of assessment for learning.

The *Principles of assessment for learning* presented here have benefited from comments from a wide variety of individuals and associations, whose help is gratefully acknowledged. This leaflet/poster is a further step towards changing assessment practice to safeguard the necessary quality of learning experiences needed for achieving the goals of education.



The Assessment Reform Group (ARG) has played a key role in bringing the research evidence about assessment for learning to the attention of the education community through the commissioned Black and Wiliam work, *Inside the Black Box*, and the follow-up, *Assessment for Learning: beyond the black box*. In continuing its endeavour to improve practice in assessment it has developed the *Principles of assessment for learning*.

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For further information about the work of the Assessment Reform Group, and to download copies of this leaflet/poster, please see http://www.assessment-reform-group.org.uk