

Assessment for learning

About the concept

Assessment for learning (AfL) is the process of seeking and interpreting evidence that helps teachers to assess their learners' progress and helps learners to monitor themselves. The evidence will show where learners are in their learning and helps teachers and learners jointly to decide what the next steps should be.

AfL focuses attention on the **how** of learning as well as the **what** and is one of the most powerful ways of improving learning and raising standards. Building it into sessions means that learners understand:

- the goals they are pursuing
- the criteria that will be applied to assessing their work
- how they will receive feedback
- how they will take part in assessing their learning
- how they can make further progress.

Putting it into practice

Developing learning conversations and questioning

Learners will reveal the level of their knowledge, understanding and skills when they are engaged in tasks that promote thoughtful and sustained conversations. Peer-to-peer conversations can be particularly effective ways of sharing knowledge and surfacing misconceptions. Teachers can support learners by intervening only when absolutely necessary and then by asking questions rather than providing solutions. This way, the conversations continue at a deeper level. The video clip:

Understanding meaning and language illustrates this.

Giving appropriate feedback

Assessment in the form of feedback can encourage learning and increase motivation. To be helpful, it should:

- be constructive and start with positives
- focus on the work rather than the person
- focus on progress and achievement rather than failure or deficits
- state explicitly what the learner has done rather than simply giving praise or criticism
- help learners plan the next steps in their learning.

Appropriate feedback protects learners' autonomy and creates opportunities for self-direction.

Developing the expert learner

Sharing criteria with learners

Learners need to understand the purpose of learning, learning objectives and success criteria in different topic areas and in their development as learners. They often find this challenging but their involvement and commitment is likely to be greater when they have a role in deciding goals and identifying criteria. Making criteria explicit and regularly discussing 'real' examples can help them.

Peer and self-assessment

Self-assessment helps learners to become more involved in reflecting on their own learning. Peer assessment enables learners to take on the role of the teacher and see learning from the teacher's perspective. It helps learners to give and take criticism in a non-threatening way and in a language they understand. Both approaches help learners to become autonomous.

For more information on assessment for learning, go to the Publications section on the Assessment Reform Group's website www.assessment-reform-group.org and download **Assessment for learning: 10 principles Research based principles to guide classroom practice** (ARG, 2002).