

An examination into inclusion, student autonomy and constructive feedback being core principles of good practice in assessment in art-based education.

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1.0 Introduction to assessment and the different assessment concepts and continuums.

Assessment plays a key role in education. “Assessment is the process of gathering, recording, interpreting, using, and reporting information about a child’s progress and achievement in developing knowledge, skills and attitudes” (NCCA, 2008, p.7). Assessment can inform the teaching and learning that takes place and therefore benefits both the student and the teacher. Assessment is a “integral part of teaching and learning, and not as something that occurs at a separate time or in a separate place” (Lysaght, Scully, Murchan, O’Leary, Shiel, 2019, p.3). In order for assessment to be effective it needs to “be a routine part of teaching and learning” (Lysaght, Scully, Murchan, O’Leary, Shiel, 2019, p.6). Assessment can be a planning tool for teachers “assessments are used to investigate what people know and can do and to make decisions regarding whether they have learned what was expected” (Rayment, 2007, p.102). Assessment can also assist in the learning, when it becomes a routine part of the classroom practice and can help drive the learning forward (Black, Dylan, 2001). “In education, the term assessment refers to the wide variety of methods or tools that educators use to evaluate, measure, and document the academic readiness, learning progress, skill acquisition, or educational needs of students” (The Glossary of Education Reform, 2015). Assessment has many different roles within the school setting beyond marking the students work, it benefits the school as a whole and helps communicates the students’ progress with their parents and guardians. “Assessment serves multiple purposes such as providing information about student learning and progress, teaching quality, and program and institutional accountability” (Opre, 2015, p.229).



Figure 1: Assessment Continuum. Lysaght, Z., Scully, D., Murchan, D., O'Leary, M., Shiel, G.(2019) *Aligning Assessment, Learning and Teaching in Curricular Reform and Implementation*. NCCA.ie

Assessment exists on a continuum (Lysaght, Scully, Murchan, O'Leary, Shiel, 2019). Three types of assessment that exist on the continuum according to the NCCA are organic, visible and planned interactions, see figure 1. The three types can clash as they sit in-between formative and summative assessment. “Assessment as an organic activity encapsulates the idea that it is something that occurs naturally, and on an ongoing basis in the classroom. It does not in any sense interrupt the process of teaching and learning; rather, it is an invisible – but real – part of this process” (Lysaght, Scully, Murchan, O'Leary, Shiel, 2019, p.5).

Organic assessment is student led and happens during self and peer evaluations. Whereas, planned interactions is teacher led, focusing on questioning the students’ knowledge and adjusting the teaching to suit the student’s needs. Visible assessment, focuses on effective feedback between the teacher and the student, concentrating on promoting progress. The core principles of good practices identified in this work is inclusion of every student, constructive feedback and student autonomy. These principles are examined under assessment for learning and formative assessment headings.

1.1 Assessment for Learning

“Assessment for learning (formative assessment) holds the most promise for improving student learning and achievement” (Volante, 2018, p.14). The core principles identified in

this work, feedback, inclusion and student autonomy are linked to assessment for learning. “Assessment for learning (AFL) is an approach to teaching and learning that creates feedback which is then used to improve students’ performance. Students become more involved in the learning process and from this gain confidence in what they are expected to learn and to what standard” (Cambridge Assessment International Education). ASL is an effective strategy because it is an integral part of the classroom practice, “it usually takes place in the day-to-day minute-by-minute interactions” (NCCA, 2008, p.9). Teachers using ASL focus on asking where the student is in their learning, where they are going and how they will get there (Cambridge Assessment International Education). “Goals and success criteria should be made explicit, students should not be afraid to make ‘mistakes’, and feedback has to be immediate” (Westbroek, van Rens, van den Berg, Janssen, 2020, p.956). Assessment for learning involves and benefits the teacher and the student. “AFL focuses on monitoring the quality of the learning process and on providing continuous feedback to guide learning and teaching, which can positively influence learning processes” (Westbroek, van Rens, van den Berg, Janssen, 2020, p.956).

1.2 Irelands view on curriculum and assessment reform

“Post-primary education in Ireland is in the midst of much curriculum and assessment change and teachers are at the coalface of this change” (Darmody, 2016, p.2). The role of assessment as also shifted from beginning solely focused on recording the students work to celebrating the process, as well as the end result (Lysaght, Scully, Murchan, O’Leary, Shiel, 2019).

“Central to the change is in the introduction of a new model of assessment which aims to meet the needs of the 21st century learner and consequently to present a much broader picture of student learning throughout the junior cycle” (Darmody, 2016, p.3). The new Junior Cycle encourages a combination of formative and summative assessment. The curriculum reform

has resulted in “a new dual approach to assessment involving ongoing classroom-based assessment and a final externally- assessed examination” (Darmody, 2016, p.3). Teachers have a more active role in assessing their students and implementing the new assessment guidelines following the learning outcomes for each subject. “Teachers will need to effectively use and interpret assessment information in an unprecedented manner, to reconcile formative and summative assessment procedures and to create a classroom environment where all parties engage with learning and assessment as an iterative reflective process” (Darmody, 2016, p.3).

2.0 Investigation into formative assessment and inclusion as a core principle of assessment

Within mainstream schools, teachers cater for students with a range of needs. Assessment for learning is the ideal method to imply as it is ongoing and supports the learning taking place in each lesson. In order for the teacher to be able to involve each student planned interactions like questioning should take place so the level and overall ability of the students can be assessed. Using differentiated instruction and learning. “Assessment for learning (AfL) and differentiated instruction (DI) both imply a focus on learning processes and learning needs and affect student learning positively” (Westbroek, van Rens, van den Berg, Janssen, 2020, p.955). Assessment for learning is closely linked to formative assessment. “Such assessment becomes ‘formative assessment’ when the evidence is actually used to adapt the teaching work to meet the needs” (Black, Dylan, 2001, p.2). Formative assessment is centred around the learner and their needs. By identifying their needs the teacher can identify areas the students are weaker in and the skills they need to improve (McDowell, Sambell, Davison, 2009). “Formative assessments help teachers identify concepts that students are struggling to understand, skills they are having difficulty acquiring, or learning standards they have not yet achieved so that adjustments can be made to lessons, instructional techniques, and academic

support” (The Glossary of Education Reform, 2014). Formative assessment is considered good classroom practice as it takes place over multiple lessons and results in ongoing communication and development in conjunction with the students. It is “learner centred, teacher-directed, mutually beneficial, formative, context-specific, ongoing and firmly rooted in good practice” (McDowell, Sambell, Davison, 2009).

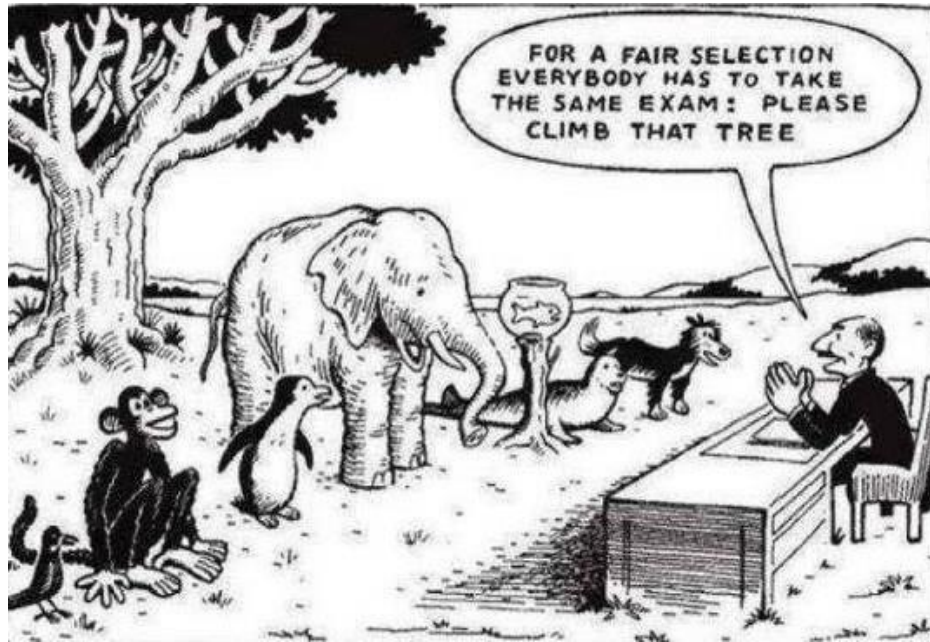


Figure 2: Standardised Testing. *Lambert, K. Debunking Education Memes, Part One. EducationWorld.ie.* URL = <https://www.educationworld.com/teachers/debunking-education-memes-part-one> (accessed: 16/12/2020).

High stakes assessment otherwise known as summative assessment can reflect badly on students with lower abilities as it only reflects the end result and not the learning and improvement the student would have underwent, see figure 2. “Formative assessment can drive the learning offering students extensive opportunities to engage in the kinds of tasks that develop and demonstrate their learning, thus building their confidence and capabilities before they are summatively assessed” (McDowell, Sambell, Davison, 2009). Formative assessment also always the teacher the ability to change their learning strategies or unit of learning to fit the student’s needs by answering Dylan and Black question “Is there evidence

that improving formative assessment raises standards?” (Black, Dylan, 2001, p.2). Formative assessment is more accessible than summative assessment as it is ongoing and focused around the students’ engagement with the material. “Teachers need to know about their pupils’ progress and difficulties with learning so that they can adapt their work to meet their needs” (Black, Dylan, 2001, p.2).

2.1 Inclusive Art Education and assessment policies

Art education has played a key role in creating a classroom environment that accommodates all learners regardless of their ability or background. Rooney and other educationalists believe “the arts lay the groundwork for socially inclusive learning environments that build on commonalities, while respecting differences” (Rooney, 2004, p.32). Art has the ability to engage all learners, as art is as much about the meaning as it is about the product (Eisner, 2004). “Arts education as a powerful instructional strategy that engages all students in learning, regardless of language, culture, and life experiences. Supporters of arts instruction for diverse learners believe that the arts make education more equitable because they “transcend” limitations and boundaries associated with diversity” (Rooney, 2004, p.20). Students need to be engaged to learn. “Arts-based instruction increases interest and motivation” (Rooney, 2004, p.8). Rooney also commented on teacher education needing to supply newly qualified teachers with the tools to use art education as a tool to engage students in learning.

Teach teachers arts-based instructional strategies to engage learners. Because students demonstrate various learning styles and interests, teachers must use an array of instructional strategies to engage them. Teachers can learn to use arts-based instruction as a vehicle for a broad range of learning experiences, including trial and error, experiential, real-life, inquiry-based, hands-on, and metacognitive learning (Rooney, 2004, p.12).

Teachers have the ability to shift value from assessing through makes and instead values imagination higher. “Places more value on the imaginative than on the factual, assigns greater priority to valuing than to measuring, and regards the quality of the journey as more educationally significant than the speed at which the destination is reached. I am talking about a new vision of what education might become and what schools are for” (Eisner, 2004, p.11). In my experience, planned interactions that are students led is the most effective way to engage all the students. This can be delivered through questioning strategies like blooms taxonomy. That features different levels of questioning from low to high order (PDST, 2010). A range of questions for different levels should be written up in preparation of the lessons. The questions should be scaffolded in order to “use to move learning forward in the zone of proximal development” (Shepard, 2005,p.1).

3.0 An investigation into Student Autonomy as a core principle of good practice in assessment

Student autonomy is focused on the students becoming the owners of their learning through self-assessment strategies. “For formative assessment to be productive, pupils should be trained in self- assessment so that they can understand the main purposes of their learning and thereby grasp what they need to do to achieve” (Black, Dylan, 2001, p.7). In order for the students to assess their own learning the learning intentions and success criteria for the class or the project need to be made clear to them. “Teaching ‘begins’ by identifying a set of learning outcomes and an associated set of activities designed to promote the achievement of these learning outcomes” (Black, Dylan, 2001, p.7). Teachers can ensure that organic assessment occurs by simply adopting a set of habits such as sharing learning outcomes and success criteria with their pupils at the start of the class. Once the students know what they are learning and what is assessed they become more aware and in charge of their own learning. Students “can only assess themselves when they have a sufficiently clear picture of

the targets that their learning is meant to attain” (Black, Dylan, 2001, p.7). Teachers can encourage their students to take ownership of their learning by “promoting learning autonomy” (Pedder, James, 2012, p.2). Students become the owners of their learning. One method is the teacher cocurate the success criteria in relation to the learning intentions planned. The students question and come up with the assessment criteria of their work. Assessment for learning alongside formative assessment concentrates on the “sense of agency and ownership among teachers and students connected to choices they make for their own and one another’s learning” (Pedder, James, 2012, p.3).

4.0 Constructive feedback as a key criteria of good practice in assessment

Teachers should create “feedback-rich learning environment that has formative assessment at its core with the intention of enabling all students to enhance their achievements”

(McDowell, Sambell, Davison, 2009). Feedback from the teacher to the student should happen on an ongoing basis in order for it to be an effective assessment and learning tool.

Supporting students learning through feedback methodologies is central to AFL. “Feedback should be timely and forward-looking so as to support current and future student learning”

(McDowell, Sambell, Davison, 2009). Students need time to act on the feedback in order for them to develop and learn. “Feedback is based on evidence of how and what the children are learning. Feedback focused on the learning or task in hand, can help children identify and celebrate their progress and achievements, pinpoint challenges they experience, and decide what the next steps should be. This level of involvement in shaping their own learning”

(NCCA, 2008, p.9). Ongoing feedback should happen as a part of the everyday assessment strategies as part of AFL is more effective than summative assessments like grading at the end of the project (Rayment, 2007). In order for feedback to work as an assessment strategy the teacher needs to supply “continuous feedback to guide and encourage pupils about their

performance on an activity” (Rayment, 2007, p.98). Feedback sits under the heading visible on the assessment continuum. Effective formative feedback should be used as a way of “guiding students’ attention to their own learning through meaningful and targeted feedback” (Heritage, Pittenger, p.3) Unlike an end grade or mark, the teachers feedback is centred around the student and their learning, the areas they are strongest in to the areas that need improvement. Once these areas are made visible, the teacher can guide the student towards improvement. “Feedback to any pupil should be about the particular qualities of his or her work, with advice on what he or she can do to improve, and should avoid comparisons with other pupils” (Black, Dylan, 2001, p.6).

4.1 How art educators use feedback as an assessment tool

The concept of ‘feedback’ implies a retrospective review of performance (Cambridge Assessment International Education). Assessment “in the arts should be formative, based on observation, and providing feedback along the way. This approach views the learner not as a test score, but as a work in progress, with needs that can be met along the way” (Rooney, 2004, p. 21). Feedback delivered to a students should be conducted in a positive manner and focus on what the students can do to continue to improve and learn. One way of implementing this is supplementing feedback with feedforward. “The proactive direction which enables the candidate to move forward is referred to as “feedforward” and is the natural extension of good feedback" (Cambridge Assessment International Education). Feedforward focuses on particular areas where students can improve, questions how and ends with step by step guidelines on how to develop the project forward. “Using feedforward, we can concentrate on what the candidate can do to improve their performance” (Cambridge Assessment International Education). Feedforward attitude links to other feedback methods that focus on the positive such as constructive conversations were the teacher highlights the

positives and one area the student should work on. Eisner views on assessing arts based education focuses on the learning as opposed to the end project. “Typical evaluation, he said, examines the extent to which results conform to a predicted outcome. Conformity, however, is not the goal for the individualist endeavours of arts and education. Evaluation in the arts should be formative, based on observation, and providing feedback along the way. This approach views the learner not as a test score, but as a work in progress, with needs that can be met along the way” (Rooney, 2004, p. 21). Feedback based assessment can be delivered in a variety of ways. Through teacher observation where the teacher keeps track of the students’ progress by observing what they have learnt. The feedforward approach focuses on offering the students a plan of action (Gonzalez, 2018). Through individual tutorials and constructive conversations with the students the teacher establishes how the project can be pushed forward, by creating a “step by step plan for improvement” (Gonzalez, 2018). Finally written reports alongside an end mark or grade can also feature feedback, in the teachers comment areas. “Always involve the production of a tangible record of the outcomes of the assessment (e.g. a written report that might include narrative feedback to the learner, and/or a grade or score)” (Lysaght, Scully, Murchan, O’Leary, Shiel, 2019, p.6). Using a combination of techniques across the unit of learning allows for the students to receive an array of feedback from their teacher through the teaching and learning process as well as at the end.

4.1 Challenges related to using the core principles, inclusion, student autonomy and feedback in arts-based education

Eisner comments that “the challenge in teaching is to provide the conditions that will foster the growth of those personal characteristics that are socially important and, at the same time, personally satisfying to the student. The aim of education is not to train an army that marches to the same drummer, at the same pace, toward the same destination” (Eisner, 2005, p.169). Teaching has to facilitate the learning of all the students with different abilities in order for

the students to improve their individual needs have to be met. This is challenging because the teacher has to divide their time to a full classroom of students, all needing assistance.

“Students’ formative, self-assessment and focused teacher feedback should be diagnostic and aimed at pinpointing how learning can be improved. This process needs to be carried out more rather than less frequently, so that the partnership of reflective practice can strategically build the full range of dispositions necessary for learning how to learn” (Briggs, 2017)

Organic assessment methods can be difficult to bring into the classroom as it relies on the students engagement. “The challenge for the teacher is shifted more from interpretation of student responses in-the-moment to the design of ‘useful prompts’ and to the anticipation of the range of possible student responses” (Westbroek, van Rens., van den Berg, Janssen, 2020, p.957). With the curriculum reform in Ireland, the assessment process has changed from strictly a summative assessment to a dual assessment process (Darmody, 2016). There is tension between formative and summative assessment. “At the root of the problem is the difficulty, perhaps impossibility, of using the same assessment instruments for a range of frequently incompatible functions such as diagnosis, tracking, target setting, reporting, evaluation, selection, accountability and monitoring national standards” (Rayment, 2007, p.22). The issue with the students assessing their own work “is not the problem of reliability and trustworthiness: it is found that pupils are generally honest and reliable in assessing both themselves and one another, and can be too hard on themselves as often as they are too kind” (Black, Dylan, 2001, p.6). Students tend to lean towards a more negative opinion of their own work, this is down to students having low self-esteem (NCCA, 2008). The teacher needs to help grow their confidence through feedback in the form of feedforward (Gonzalez, 2018). Black and William reported “that pupils are generally honest and reliable in assessing both themselves and one another, and can be too hard on themselves as often as they are too kind” (Black, Dylan, 2001, p.6 - 7). Another issue is the students are unaware of how they assess

their work, the teacher needs to counteract this fear. “Teaching ‘begins’ by identifying a set of learning outcomes and an associated set of activities designed to promote the achievement of these learning outcomes” (Lysaght, Scully, Murchan, O’Leary, Shiel, 2019, p.3). The issue with this can be that the students don’t connect or aren’t aware of the importance of the success criteria or learning outcomes. An alternative approach is the teacher and the students cocurating the success criteria in relation to the learning intentions together. The learner comes up with what should be assessed. “By engaging students as active participants in learning activities and feedback, we induct them into the requirements of their discipline or professional area of study enabling them to understand and subsequently, interrogate and challenge the standards, outcomes, and criteria used for the evaluation of high quality work” (McDowell, Sambell, Davison, 2009). Feedback is closely linked to formative assessment. “Formative assessment is often in practice seen in a limited way solely as giving feedback to students” (McDowell, Sambell, Davison, 2009). Feedback should only be one element of assessment that a teacher uses, as feedback is centred around helping the student identify areas needing improvement. “Within formative assessment they discriminate between its informal use by the teacher as a way of giving continuous feedback to guide and encourage pupils about their performance on an activity” (Rayment, 2007, p.98). Feedback mostly happens in verbal contexts. Students may not engage with the conversation rendering the conversation useless. In order to counteract this, written feedback should also be used.

Conclusion

“Assessment for learning challenges the often-voiced assumption that ‘if there are no marks attached students won’t do it’ and enables productive learning to happen without the direct reward of marks or grades. It breaks the downward spiral where marks and grades are used to

control student behaviour” (McDowell, Sambell, Davison, 2009). Assessment and learning go hand in hand when teaching, one cannot exist without the other. “Learning is driven by what teachers and pupils do in classrooms” (Black, Dylan, 2001, p.1). Assessment helps to measure the students learning in relation to the learning intentions and success criteria, through feedback and student autonomy. These principles promote inclusivity in the classroom. “Formative assessment helps the (so-called) low attainers more than the rest, and so reduces the spread of attainment whilst also raising it overall” (Black, Dylan, 2001, p.3).

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