Anna Skocz

ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING

Formative assessment, self-assessment, peer assessment, portfolio, performance. These examples are alternatives to standardised tests at the end of the teaching - learning process. Supported with cooperative learning tasks, they can make magic.

On an international course in Borgarnes entitled "Assessment for learning. Creative and Diverse Assessment Methods for Education in the 21st Century" in April 2022, my eyes were opened to the variety of formative assessment methods. What my biggest surprise was, is that formative feedback may be used across the country, across the curriculum, and as a systemic tool in education where students cannot fail one year of education and be left to repeat it. Unless they ask for it.

WHAT IS FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT?

This form of evaluation provides students with precise information about what works and what does not work in their learning. It can be written or oral, but what is essential is that it is descriptive. Students get feedback about things to improve but also about things that are working well already and on which they can build on.

Instead of short 'You got C- acceptable', a person hears e.g. 'You are already good in A and B, what needs more of your attention is C perhaps with some focus on X'. Isn't it motivating and exciting to be already good at something?

Summative assessment is used to measure the extent of learning that happened by some point of time during the process of learning (after the end of a sequence). It is useful as it tells where a student is against some standard or benchmark but it does not help to improve.

When the cook tastes the soup, that is a formative assessment.

When the customer tastes the soup, that is a summative assessment.

Paul Black

Formative assessment offers more precise and more positive, motivating feedback about learning, which some of us may already know, especially those working in the non-formal education sector. However, are there any other benefits than this?

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT AS A TOOL SUPPORTING INCLUSION

Other benefits of using formative assessment might become of particular interest to all those working with students and adults in culturally mixed groups. Suddenly, this late winter, teachers, educators and trainers in Poland had to open up and look for solutions and ways to work with Ukrainian war refugees in our educational sceneries.

Formative assessment, based on a well organised group work, offers more inclusivity and equity in a diverse group of learners, brings better chances of higher motivation and at the end better results of not only those students who face educational challenges, especially the language and social barrier, but to all who learn to be more fair and empathetic and who are finally better equipped to live in diverse societies of today.

It is important that when formative assessment and marking take place together, formative assessment is lost and the student focuses on the grade only.

Paul Black

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT IS A MENTAL PIVOT

There is a variety of formative, alternative to standardised test assessment methods which may be used to evaluate students' work, however to implement those, most of us would need to make a mental pivot while on the daily basis we are trained and programmed to 'measure', 'compare', 'achieve' and 'report' results.

To open to a **REFLECTIVE**, **MOTIVATED** and **SELF-DRIVEN LEARNING** (which is the most efficient one, benefiting mental health as well), we would need to move from NORM-referenced testing to CRITERION- referenced testing and from assessment OF learning to assessment FOR learning.

WHAT ARE THEY?

> ► **NORM-REFERENCED TESTS**

Are specifically designed to rank test takers on a 'bell curve',
or a distribution of scores that resembles, when graphed, the outline of a bell - i.e.
a small percentage of students performing on average, and a small percentage performing poorly.

> ► **CRITERION REFERENCED TEST**

Assessments are designed to measure student performance against a fixed set of predetermined criteria of learning standards- i.e. concise, written descriptions of what students are expected to know and be able to do at a specific stage of their education.

By definition they place students with differences (whether cultural, educational or physical) in the failing ranges. What they allow is to compare the students' performance with a previously determined standard.

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► **ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING**

Describes any form of assessment of which the priority in design and practice is given to serve the purpose of promoting students' learning.
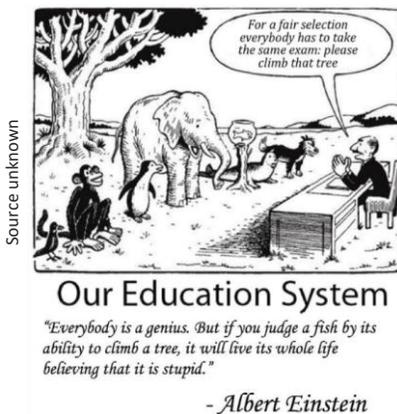
Assessment activity can help learning if it provides information that both student and teacher can use to modify their teaching and learning in the future.

► **ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING**

Designed primarily to serve the purpose of accountability or of ranking or of certifying competences. Measurable and 'final', leaving limited space and motivation to develop further learning in the topic.

> While norm - based testing, assessment of learning and standardised tests tend to place a person and their abilities in a certain box or category measuring what they are able to do and what they are not able to do, assessment for learning and criterion based assessment **support learning** as an ongoing process, **upkeep engagement** and student attention at higher level, **boosting motivation** as well as precisely communicate what to do next to improve or be even better at.

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT WORKS BETTER FOR THE MULTICULTURAL/DIVERSE GROUPS

For a fair selection everybody has to take the same exam: please climb that tree

Source unknown

Our Education System

"Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid."

- Albert Einstein

While homogenous groups work more efficiently, diverse (culturally, educationally or physically) groups may take longer to achieve the final outcome.

Whatever the time and effort, the result is definitely worth it. Why? Because thanks to experience of achieving common success, accompanied with empathy, patience, understanding and respect, we prepare learners and equip them with tools, attitudes and competences crucial for a peaceful, respectful and harmonious coexistence in diverse societies.

Nevertheless, while formative assessment supports learning, implementing a formative assessment tool in your working group is not enough, as such. To make it work well, you need to apply a well organised group work offering **STRUCTURE** (brings safety to a diverse group), **EQUALITY** (rotation of group roles brings balanced experience -for empathy and better understanding) and a long enough **TIMELINE**, so that people can learn, apply and practise the new system and undergo learning.

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT BACKED UP WITH CRITICAL, CREATIVE COOPERATIVE LEARNING (CCCL)
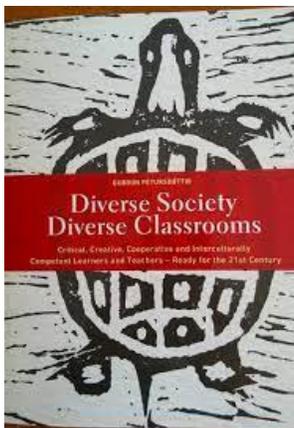
Such structured group work is offered in detail by Gudrun Petursdottir, a school and academic teacher with vast intercultural experience under Critical, Creative Cooperative Learning (CCCL) term. In her book *Diverse Society, Diverse Classroom*[1] Gudrun elaborates about the structure she gives to CCCL in her teaching- learning practice.

In her methodology, the teacher/workshop leader divides students into groups of 5, giving them always the same structure of roles for a certain task. They are:

- ► Organiser
- ► Material manager
- ► Time planner
- ► Reporter
- ► Harmoniser

Group	Organiser	Material manager	Time planner	Reporter	Harmoniser
I	Person A	Person B	Person C	Person D	Person E
II	Person 1	Person 2	Person 3	Person 4	Person 5

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[1] Petursdottir G., Diverse Society, Diverse Classroom. Critical, Creative Cooperative and Interculturally Competent Learners and Teachers- Ready for 21st Century. InterCultural Island, Reykjavik 2018

► Students rotate among these roles with every next group task they receive over a period of time (a couple of weeks for example).

► Teacher/workshop leader assigns the roles each time themself and makes sure that each person has a chance to experience each role.

► For every group task there shall always be a written instruction (managed by the **organiser**), central material box with useful and creative items available (available to **material manager** only) and final presentation of the group work expected (task for the **reporter**). All that shall be happening with the supervision of the **time manager** (responsible for timekeeping) and with the support of the **harmoniser** (responsible for motivation and high spirits of the team).

► The responsibility of the teacher/ workshop leader is to create a good and safe class atmosphere and make sure the things roll on. When well prepared, after 2-3 group tasks are implemented (when students finally learn and understand the scheme), things usually roll on by themself.

Why is it important to work in this manner?
CCCL gives students equal opportunities, shared experiences and a chance to get involved in the process of learning, boosting their motivation instead of scaring them with final test results only.

WHAT FORMS OF FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT CAN WE THINK OF?

There are several alternatives of formative assessment one can apply. What is important, is that whichever you choose, you are free to modify it, add, take away, merge etc. since in the assessment FOR learning, it is the process that is more important (with the feedback provided on the way) than the final result. Among others, you can read about peer assessment, self- assessment and performance here.

Peer assessment

Peer assessment makes students take responsibility for the assessment and shall take place in reference to previously set criteria. It increases students' awareness and understanding of what the assessment is about and develops their better connection with the task.

However, it is important and advised to previously train students about the goal of the assessment (assessment shall support improvement, the point is to judge neither the project nor the persons involved), to familiarise them with the criteria and set guidance for giving and receiving feedback (being precise, descriptive, making suggestions not judgements, talking more about the project/work, less about the person).

It is good to prepare and inform students about what role the peer assessment will play in the final grading,

> ▶ whether it will be peer assessment and teacher assessment taken into account in the final mark or would it be teacher assessment only,
> ▶ whether feedbacked students will have an opportunity to improve on the way (recommended) or would it be final
> ▶ whether the assessment will be used for the grade at all or just for practising
> ▶ how it is decided who evaluates who (randomly, teacher decides, will everyone have a chance to assess everyone)

For those students who find it challenging to communicate positive and at the same time constructive feedback, you may tell them to use a 2 stars and a wish scheme (never mind how many wishes there is a need to list, the person is able to take into consideration maximum 1 or 2 at a time).

TWO ★ AND A WISH - is a feedback giving method where the focus is given to 2 good aspects of the work/project and 1 aspect to be improved.

Self assessment

Self assessment supports students' performance by making them more reflexive and familiar with the criteria, bringing responsibility for evaluation of good (or poor!) performance making them more able to identify the good sides of their work as well as gaps and improvement areas:

> ▶ You may ask students to highlight the best aspect of their work and why they think it is good
> ▶ You may ask students where they have met the criteria and what has been lost on the way.
> ▶ You may ask students to highlight the areas of improvement.

A good example of a self assessment tool may be a **GRID**, like the broadly recognized **Common European Framework of Reference for Languages - CEFR**, where a person evaluates their work following certain criteria.

Common European Framework of Reference for Languages - Self-assessment grid

		A1 Basic User	A2 Basic User	B1 Independent user	B2 Independent user	C1 Proficient user	C2 Proficient user
Understanding	Listening	I can understand familiar words and very basic phrases concerning myself, my family and immediate concrete surroundings when people speak slowly and clearly.	I can understand phrases and the highest frequency vocabulary related to areas of most immediate personal relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local area, employment). I can catch the main point in short, clear, simple messages and announcements.	I can understand the main points of clear standard speech on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. I can understand the main point of many radio or TV programmes on current affairs or topics of personal or professional interest when the delivery is relatively slow and clear.	I can understand extended speech and lectures and follow even complex lines of argument provided the topic is reasonably familiar. I can understand most TV news and current affairs programmes. I can understand the majority of films in standard dialect.	I can understand extended speech even when it is not clearly structured and when relationships are only implied and not signalled explicitly. I can understand television programmes and films without too much effort.	I have no difficulty in understanding any kind of spoken language, whether live or broadcast, even when delivered at fast native speed, provided I have some time to get familiar with the accent.
	Reading	I can understand familiar names, words and very simple sentences, for example on notices and posters or in catalogues.	I can read very short, simple texts. I can find specific, predictable information in simple everyday material such as advertisements, prospectuses, menus and timetables and I can understand short simple personal letters.	I can understand texts that consist mainly of high frequency everyday or job-related language. I can understand the description of events, feelings and wishes in personal letters.	I can read articles and reports concerned with contemporary problems in which the writers adopt particular attitudes or viewpoints. I can understand contemporary literary prose.	I can understand long and complex factual and literary texts, appreciating distinctions of style. I can understand specialised articles and longer technical instructions, even when they do not relate to my field.	I can read with ease virtually all forms of the written language, including abstract, structurally or linguistically complex texts such as manuals, specialised articles and literary works.
Speaking	Spoken interaction	I can interact in a simple way provided the other person is prepared to repeat or rephrase things at a slower rate of speech and help me formulate what I'm trying to say. I can ask and answer simple questions in areas of immediate need or on very familiar topics.	I can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar topics and activities. I can handle very short social exchanges, even though I can't usually understand enough to keep the conversation going myself.	I can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. I can enter unprepared into conversation on topics that are familiar, of personal interest or pertinent to everyday life (e.g. family, hobbies, work, travel and current events).	I can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible. I can take an active part in discussion in familiar contexts, accounting for and sustaining my views.	I can express myself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. I can use language flexibly and effectively for social and professional purposes. I can formulate ideas and opinions with precision and relate my contribution skilfully to those of other speakers.	I can take part effortlessly in any conversation or discussion and have a good familiarity with idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms. I can express myself fluently and convey finer shades of meaning precisely. If I do have a problem I can backtrack and restructure around the difficulty so smoothly that other people are hardly aware of it.
	Spoken production	I can use simple phrases and sentences to describe where I live and people I know.	I can use a series of phrases and sentences to describe in simple terms my family and other people, living conditions, my educational background and my present or most recent job.	I can connect phrases in a simple way in order to describe experiences and events, my dreams, hopes and ambitions. I can briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans. I can narrate a story or relate the plot of a book or film and describe my reactions.	I can present clear, detailed descriptions on a wide range of subjects related to my field of interest. I can explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.	I can present clear, detailed descriptions of complex subjects integrating sub themes, developing particular points and rounding off with an appropriate conclusion.	I can present a clear, smoothly-flowing description or argument in a style appropriate to the context and with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points.
Writing	Writing	I can write a short, simple postcard, for example sending holiday greetings. I can fill in forms with personal details, for example entering my name, nationality and address on a hotel registration form.	I can write short, simple notes and messages. I can write a very simple personal letter, for example thanking someone for something.	I can write simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. I can write personal letters describing experiences and impressions.	I can write clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects related to my interests. I can write an essay or report, passing on information or giving reasons in support of or against a particular point of view. I can write letters highlighting the personal significance of events and experiences.	I can express myself in clear, well-structured text, expressing points of view at some length. I can write about complex subjects in a letter, an essay or a report, underlining what I consider to be the salient issues. I can select a style appropriate to the reader in mind.	I can write clear, smoothly-flowing text in an appropriate style. I can write complex letters, reports or articles which present a case with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points. I can write summaries and reviews of professional or literary works.

Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEF): © Council of Europe

DOWNLOAD

SELF-ASSESMENT GRID (*PDF*)

Another good example of self - assessment might be a **PORTFOLIO** - where pieces of work are collected throughout a period of time. They often show compelling stories about students' growth via a collection of authentic performances.

What is important and brings some 'lightness' to the educator is that **self assessment shifts responsibility from the educator to the student** - at the end of the day, it is not you, the educator, to be blamed for a poor or 'unfair' result.

It is recommended though, to offer a certain level of student involvement in the development (and therefore comprehension) of the criteria.

Performance

Performance requires students to demonstrate that they have mastered specific skills and competences by performing or producing something.

They might be designing or carrying out experiments, writing essays (to rethink, integrate or apply information), critiques, poems or short stories, building models, writing songs, making collections, posters, websites, leaflets, collages, power points, videos (explaining concepts), giving speeches, participating in oral examination, presenting drama (pantomime, role play, frozen images, finger puppets…), making graphs, histograms, tables etc. The point of making the performance is to get involved in the highest level of learning - being able to explain things to the others.

Assessing multicultural/diversified group work is more effective if:

▶ all students know what will be assessed and how marks will be allocated (if grading takes place)

▶ difficult aspects such as **managing conflict effectively attract a percentage of the final mark** or feedback that reflects the effort involved

▶ it is clear how students track and record their own and other's efforts

▶ marks are allocated to reflect individual effort; judging individual effort is problematic in all group work and even more so where multilingual membership is involved, especially if peer assessment is used; criteria for a 'good performance' needs to address the relative importance of **language competence**

▶ creative presentation methods (e.g. poster, video, drama or oral exam) are rehearsed with formative feedback on how to improve

SUMMARY

If inclusive education works for the benefit of diverse societies, then formative assessment is a tool supporting learning and development in that direction.

If we want learners with developed communication skills, able to function effectively in diverse societies, ready to handle challenges of the 21st century peacefully (not violently), then we need to stand up more confidently and truly when implementing methods and methodologies working for that benefit.

Being trained in the Polish education system (filled with standardised tests and numeric grades), being project manager in the third sector (with my work being evaluated by donors through the 'measurable results'), it always takes me extra time and effort to make this 'mental pivot' and shift my perspective and approach from the 'results driven and norm- oriented' to the 'process oriented and criterion based'. Nevertheless, real learning takes place when the space is safe and ready to support, not to judge, where the assessment FOR learning takes place.

I am glad to be reminded about it once again and I do hope that if it can be working that effectively in Iceland, some day it can be working well also in Poland.

Author:

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