

## A brief introduction to assessment for learning

Assessment for Learning (AfL) is about undertaking assessment during the flow of learning in order to impact upon that learning. It sounds appealing and simple. However, it can be surprisingly challenging to put into practice. As a result, it doesn't always have the positive impact on learning that is expected.

***Assessment for Learning** refers to the **formative** use of assessment information, gathered from **both formal tests and informal observations** of students, their work, and their responses in classroom discussion, **to gain insight into the students' learning progress**, so that teachers and students can **adapt their teaching and learning strategies** to better support that learning.*

When done well, AfL enhances learning by indicating where learners require additional support and what is appropriate next as a learning challenge. It is a process of 'learning, for learning, in learning' — teachers and students are continually learning about what understanding the students have gained, in order to inform the next teaching and learning act.

AfL is a collaborative partnership between teachers and students in which teachers and students learn together about students' learning progress and needs. AfL supports the transfer of the ownership of learning to the students, so that students gradually come to manage their own learning.

It is based on increasing use of self- and peer assessment which, in primary and secondary education, are shown to:

- increase student engagement and enable greater autonomy from the teacher
- reduce the gap between the highest and lowest achievers, and raise achievement overall
- support more equitable outcomes for all students
- improve motivation and perseverance
- develop students' self-regulation skills and metacognition (understanding of their learning)
- give students a strong sense of self-efficacy for developing their own effective study habits
- enrich students' reasoning and improve communication skills
- create a more egalitarian and supportive classroom environment

### Examples of AfL include:

- Teaching all content of a unit in the first eight weeks of term, then testing students. Analysing the test scripts and using that information to plan the content for the final two weeks of term.
- Giving each student an index card at the close of a lesson and asking them to respond to a question to assess their understanding of what was covered in the lesson; e.g. "Why are historians concerned about bias in historical sources?" Collecting in the cards and using this information to plan the next lesson.
- Asking students to predict the results of an experiment by raising hands, to check their understanding of a concept. Observing which students are very confident and accurate in their predictions, and which seem confused, and then using this information to pair confident students with less confident students for the lesson's activity.

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- Students using a framework to evaluate each other's work in pairs, and to suggest one way their partner can improve, before supporting each other to revise their work.
  - Providing students with the terms of a concept map, and asking them to organise the terms to show their understanding of the interrelationships. Moving around the class to monitor their progress, stopping to ask students to explain their reasoning and addressing any misconceptions.
  - Hot-seating the teacher: encouraging questioning of the teacher by the students, to prompt students to identify the information or knowledge they need, as well as for the teacher to learn about students' thinking from their questions.
  - 'Taking an answer around the class': asking students to build on one student's initial answer, to get a selection of responses from students, as well as to enable students to learn from each other.