



**OUTSTANDING
ASSESSMENT
FOR
LEARNING
IN THE
CLASSROOM**

A David Fulton Book

JAYNE BARTLETT

Outstanding Assessment for Learning in the Classroom

The main feature of an outstanding lesson is that all students make progress. Taking the structure of a lesson as the starting point, this book demonstrates how assessment for learning can be used to enhance and support all aspects of the learning process. Including chapters on embedding assessment during each phase of the lesson, using assessment data to inform planning, questioning techniques and feedback, the book will help you to use assessment effectively to produce outstanding results.

Packed full of practical strategies, this book shows you how you can make assessment meaningful in the classroom, directly impacting on your students and creating a more autonomous learning environment. It is written specifically with the class teacher in mind and draws on a range of different examples across many subjects to deliver ideas that can be translated with ease to everyday teaching practices.

With a strong focus on including assessment practices in the planning process to achieve outstanding results, this book covers:

- assessment for learning and an overview of the learning cycle;
- practical teaching strategies and effective techniques to use in the classroom;
- marking, feedback and using data to drive learning; and
- embedding assessment for learning in your classroom, department and school.

An effective guide for outstanding teaching and learning, this book offers an innovative approach and is packed full of practical exercises that are easy to apply in the classroom, proving essential reading for newly qualified and experienced teachers alike.

Dr Jayne Bartlett has worked in education for over ten years in a range of schools with roles at senior leadership level and is currently working freelance as an independent teaching and learning trainer and consultant.

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Outstanding Assessment for Learning in the Classroom

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To Oliver and Olivia

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I have thoroughly enjoyed writing this book and I hope that you enjoy reading it.

Introduction

Assessment for learning is integral to outstanding teaching and integral to developing outstanding learning. It is not a bolt-on technique and in many ways we need to change our mind-set to gain a real understanding of its value. Having spent several years working with teachers and senior leaders translating current research into the classroom, I decided to write a book that approaches assessment for learning from a different perspective: integrating assessment practices during the planning process to ensure outstanding learning rather than as an afterthought (or, indeed, something that is never really planned for in the first place).

This book is written specifically with the class teacher in mind and I use lots of different examples across a range of subjects giving teachers ideas which can be translated with ease to everyday practices. It is important to remember that there is not a formula for achieving outstanding teaching (although there are techniques one can employ) and, indeed, one teacher able to support outstanding learning in their classroom may *teach* very differently to another. It is more important, therefore, that we find strategies that enable us to develop our own practices as outstanding practitioners. As such, this book is not meant to be prescriptive but to be used as a resource to support you on your journey to implementing outstanding assessment for learning in your classroom.

In [Chapter 1](#) we review current literature and research including assessment *for*, *as* and *of* learning, focusing on the need for all types of assessment and the respective role in developing outstanding learning and supporting outstanding progress. We consider the link between learning to learn and assessment for learning and discuss the learning environment, concluding with the idea that assessment for learning bridges the gap between teachers teaching and learners learning.

[Chapter 2](#) introduces the next stage of the book where we focus on the lesson itself, introducing the active learning cycle and how we sequence learning within a lesson. This is linked to the terminology most teachers are comfortable with of starter, main and plenary; however, it is emphasised that I do not advocate a specific lesson structure: more that different activities and different approaches to

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assessment for learning may be taken at different phases of the lesson; reference to starter, main and plenary simply helps teachers to relate to different stages in the learning process. The different approaches we can take to structuring a lesson using the learning cycle as a frame are discussed. There is an emphasis on the importance of assessment opportunities during the cycle to direct learning, enable reflection and to ensure progress is made between successive cycles, all of which involve pupils in shaping their own learning. Based loosely on the different phases of learning (starter, main and plenary) [Chapters 3, 4 and 5](#) develop assessment strategies within each, and each chapter offers a wealth of practical examples from a range of different subjects which can be employed with ease across all subjects.

The start of the lesson is discussed in detail in [Chapter 3](#), from the moment pupils arrive in the classroom. The concept of bell work, a Big Question (used as a comparative tool in assessment for learning) and the starter activity itself (knowing where pupils are starting from) are developed. We discuss the importance of learning outcomes and success criteria and how these can be used during the lesson to support pupil progress. The importance of assessment for learning and the different strategies are discussed in depth and this chapter is packed with lots of practical examples.

Learning in the main part of the lesson is addressed in [Chapter 4](#). The important thing is to build on what pupils already know (from the starter) to develop learning. This part of the lesson may be a single learning cycle, several learning cycles or, indeed, a mixture of this for different pupils (linking the importance of assessment for learning and differentiation). We look at the importance of review and discuss different assessment processes which can be used during learning; there is a link to the use of success criteria. Collaborative learning opportunities are also addressed, with lots of examples of different techniques which can be employed in the classroom, and, most importantly, assessment for learning during collaborative learning opportunities. One of the major shifts in education from the past has been the change in how pupils think about learning in their classrooms. It used to be very much driven by ‘being right’ and getting ‘ten out of ten’, with little emphasis on how we got there. Now, of course, there is more emphasis on developing concepts as part of the learning process and in doing so allowing pupils to make mistakes from which they learn. Pupils need to be challenged and this shift owes itself to continual formative assessment in the classroom. Ongoing formative assessment, almost subconsciously second-by-second, is how teachers develop outstanding learning in their classrooms. Lots of practical teaching strategies are offered through examples that cover different subject areas, ensuring that teachers can easily transfer these techniques to their own planning and delivery. Cross-curricular learning and assessment opportunities are discussed towards the end of the chapter.

[Chapter 5](#) focuses on the final section of the lesson, which many teachers refer to as the plenary. Here we emphasise the need for the plenary to challenge pupils further, allowing us to assess whether they have mastered the key concepts. The idea is that the plenary is not just more of the same, but also an opportunity to assess pupils' understanding, avoiding the possibility for pupils to apply a 'recipe' to any problem, scenario or set of questions, thus creating greater autonomy in learning. The Big Question is returned to and used to demonstrate pupil progress, allowing pupils to measure their success against the key success criteria for the lesson, comparing their initial and final response. We also discuss the importance of review and address different techniques which can be used to support this process. Home learning is also touched on and, once again, this chapter is full of examples from different subject areas which are easy to apply.

The chapters which follow look in more detail at different aspects of assessment for learning. These include effective questioning, marking and feedback, the data-driven school and embedding assessment for learning in the classroom, department and whole school.

Classroom dialogue is so important, yet most revolves around recall and lower-order thinking skills. If we are to challenge pupils and deepen learning we need to use higher-order questions. [Chapter 6](#) looks at the importance of questioning in the classroom, from both the teacher and pupil, and how to use questioning to assess learning and to develop higher-order conceptual and cognitive skills. Assessment through questioning is one of the most readily available resources to teachers, yet is often under-used or poorly used; with a greater understanding of questioning techniques teachers can facilitate outstanding classroom discussions and generate outstanding opportunities to assess learning, thus ensuring outstanding progress. In this chapter, Bloom's Taxonomy provides the basis for questioning techniques with a focus on application in different subject areas and in developing higher-order thinking skills and the importance of questioning to ensure learning has occurred beyond, for example, the often used 'traffic light' pupil self-assessment (used, in reality sometimes, more for effect than impact). Indeed, it is the questioning that allows us to assess the depth of understanding; questioning is, of course, a technique that is freely available to use as a resource. All we have to do is master the art of effective questioning, leading to outstanding assessment for learning.

Marking and feedback form a significant part of the assessment for learning agenda in any school. Gaining the right balance and ensuring that marking and feedback are valued by pupils and teacher alike is essential, not least because it is an extremely time-consuming aspect of the teaching profession and yet, in reality, often has limited impact on pupil learning and progress; in some cases

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it can act negatively. [Chapter 7](#) reviews different marking and feedback techniques and suggests ways to move forward to ensure that an effective balance is achieved. Active marking strategies are discussed in detail and examples of effective marking and feedback practices are used to illustrate different techniques which can be easily applied in the classroom. We also discuss using the learning environment to support assessment for learning.

School leaders and teachers are provided with a wealth of information (data) and, in [Chapter 8](#), we look at how to best use this data to plan for outstanding learning in the classroom, focusing on assessment data (both summative and formative) and how to use this to inform planning. We look at the need for data and the importance of quality over quantity, focusing on problems that arise with data, the effective use of data, populating data and a note of caution over assessment data and its use, including the role of target setting. In this chapter we aim to demystify some of the summative data that teachers are provided with, recognising that many teachers are not confident mathematicians and have little understanding of how whole-school targets and data are then filtered to the pupils in their classrooms, impacting on their practice before they have even begun teaching (sometimes before they have even met the pupil in person). Examples are used to illustrate the points in an attempt to make data more user-friendly to teachers, taking a more practical approach to the topic of data-driven learning and the data-driven learning environment.

[Chapter 9](#) looks at embedding assessment for learning in your classroom, department and school and the need for reviewing current practice. It looks at the importance of a general whole-school policy which is then translated at department level and at classroom level to ensure that the policy has impact on pupil learning and progress within subject areas and that it is a workable model for all stakeholders. We review the importance of quality assurance and suggest that focusing observations on the quality of learning and not just the quality of teaching can be a better way of assessing the impact of any whole-school learning policy.

In summary, [Chapter 1](#) reviews current research and [Chapters 2, 3, 4](#) and [5](#) look at making assessment for learning an integral part of planning for learning. [Chapters 6, 7](#) and [8](#) look at different generic pedagogy and [Chapter 9](#) then focuses on how to embed assessment practices. The book concludes with a checklist summary for all chapters, acting as a quick reminder of the strategies available to support assessment for learning during learning.

Overall, this book looks at how to ensure that assessment for learning is an intrinsic part of your lesson, from planning to delivery, and I hope that it supports you in developing outstanding assessment for learning in your classrooms.

What do we mean by assessment for learning?

Assessment has always been part of educational practice and has evolved alongside teaching pedagogies. We use assessment for different reasons, in a variety of contexts and with multiple stakeholders. This ranges from supporting the learning of an individual pupil in the classroom to monitoring national standards against international performance. There are two key types of assessment that schools refer to: formative assessment and summative assessment, and both contribute to our education system, although there is, perhaps, too much emphasis on summative assessment; we need to see a shift towards further developing effective formative assessment strategies in the classroom.

We must recognise that formative assessment is nothing new. In 1967, Michael Scriven first described it as ‘the on-going improvement of the curriculum’ (Scriven, 1967) and in 1969 Bloom (Bloom, 1969) related this to classroom tests: ‘by formative evaluation we mean evaluation by brief tests used by teachers and students as aids in the learning process’, continuing to ‘we see much more effective use of formative evaluation if it is separated from the grading process and used primarily as an aid to teaching’. He went on to state that the purpose of formative evaluation was ‘to provide feedback and correctives at each stage in the teaching-learning process’ (Bloom, 1969). These definitions have naturally evolved and over recent years assessment for learning has become the focus of much research – most notably with Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam, who defined formative assessment as ‘encompassing all those activities undertaken by teachers, and/or by their students, which provide information to be used as feedback to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged’ (Black and Wiliam, 1998). Their publication, *Inside the Black Box*, acted as a vehicle to prioritise assessment for learning, bringing it to the forefront of the raising achievement agenda. Cowie and Bell refined this definition to specify that formative assessment must take place during the learning process itself, defining it as ‘the process used by teachers

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and students to recognise and respond to learning in order to enhance that learning, during the learning' (Cowie and Bell, 1999).

There is a multitude of research and, ultimately, however we define assessment for learning, it is recognised as a powerful driver in raising pupil achievement. If pupils understand what they are trying to achieve, where they currently are in their own learning and how they are going to achieve learning aims (effectively identifying the gap and closing it), then evidence suggests they become more empowered as learners. Wiliam and Black identified in a review of research that 'attention to the use of assessment to inform instruction, particularly at the classroom level, in many cases effectively doubled the speed of students' learning' (Wiliam, 2011).

In 2002, the Assessment Reform Group (<http://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/assessment-reform-group>) listed the following ten research-based principles to guide classroom practice.

Assessment for learning:

- is part of effective planning
- focuses on how students learn
- is central to classroom practice
- is a key professional skill
- is sensitive and constructive
- fosters motivation
- promotes understanding of goals and criteria
- helps learners know how to improve
- develops the capacity for self-assessment
- recognises all educational achievement.

Dylan Wiliam (Leahy *et al.*, 2005) identifies the key elements of assessment for learning as activities which are equally powerful to all learners in all contexts:

- sharing learning intentions and success criteria
- engineering effective classroom discussions
- formative feedback
- activating learners as resources for each other
- activating learners as owners of their own learning.

While the underlying strategies are certainly formalised in many books and research articles, it is the translation of these to practical techniques

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in the classroom that teachers can use to improve the quality of teaching and learning and to support pupils in making progress that will ultimately have the impact on pupil achievement and attainment. Unfortunately, the link between research and daily classroom practice is often ‘lost in translation’. With their busy day-to-day lives, many teachers don’t have time to review educational research, so they rely on interpretation from others; by the time this reaches the classroom practitioner, we often have a case of ‘Chinese Whispers’, losing the true value. Sadly, assessment for learning can become an exercise – for example, in asking pupils to traffic light work and go little beyond them identifying red, amber or green (RAG rating) – ultimately having no impact on learning (using a bolt-on technique rather than the process to support progress). Often these strategies are high gear, meaning that they need only a little tweaking and more focusing to make them high leverage in terms of the impact on pupil learning.

In this book, I hope to support teachers in this process, bringing tried and tested techniques that they can implement with confidence, that are workable and that will support pupils in developing their own learning pathways. I strongly believe assessment for learning is a continual process during learning and that there is a danger that, by over-emphasising activities such as traffic lighting, we de-value the true nature of assessment for learning that, in my opinion, is far more than RAG rating, or other such technique, but really involves learners in the learning process and is, therefore, ongoing and not simply an isolated bolt-on activity. To treat it as such really does mean the power of assessment for learning is lost in translation.

Other assessment terminology you will, no doubt, have heard include assessment *as* and *of* learning. ‘Assessment as learning’ is the term commonly used to imply assessment which involves the pupils making assessments of themselves or their peers during the learning process and is most commonly exemplified in classrooms through peer- and self-assessment. This is ongoing and learners become involved in developing their own learning pathways. We will consider assessment as learning techniques as the book develops, and assessment *for* and *as* learning form the focus.

‘Assessment of learning’ is known as summative assessment and this typically occurs at the end of a topic or period of pupil development. It often provides a quantitative score or measure against outcomes after the learning is complete. Assessments can be class-based, school-based, national or international. In 2006, the Assessment Reform Group stated that ‘summative assessment must be in harmony with the procedures of formative assessment and should be designed to minimise the burden on teachers and pupils’ (Assessment Reform Group, 2006).

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It is worth noting that some researchers argue ‘assessment for learning and formative assessment are not synonymous’ (Swaffield, 2011). Stiggins (Stiggins, 2005) states that ‘If formative assessment is about more frequent, assessment for learning is about continuous. If formative assessment is about providing teachers with evidence, assessment for learning is about informing the students themselves.’ I often refer to assessment *in* learning because, for me, this emphasises the real-time nature of assessment in informing learning during the learning process, but it could be argued that this is just a play on words. The research makes interesting reading and there are many different definitions of formative assessment put forward. The purpose of this book, however, is not to debate current research (although there is an abundance of insightful and thought provoking reading which, if you have time, is interesting to review), but to use assessment in our practices in the classroom to best impact on the progress of learners, irrespective of the ‘formal’ definition.

Learning to learn and the learning environment

Formative assessment goes hand-in-hand with learning to learn (metacognition). Having the best learning environment in the world is no substitute for pupils having the skills to be able to develop their own learning. Guy Claxton talks about the 4Rs (resilience, resourcefulness, reflectiveness and reciprocity) and building learning power (Claxton, 2002). These 4Rs link with assessment for learning and we begin to see formative assessment woven into developing all aspects of the learner. Resilience: being able to absorb, manage, observe and persevere. Resourcefulness: being able to question, make links, spot connections, imagine and reason. Reflectiveness: to be able to plan, revise, distil and meta-learn. Reciprocity: to be able to develop interdependence, collaborate, listen and imitate.

Assessment for learning is, therefore, integral to best practice in teaching and integral to best practice in learning. Indeed, when we attend best practice seminars or professional development sessions we will repeatedly hear the phrase ‘teaching and learning’ – although some prefer ‘learning and teaching’, feeling that this places more emphasis on learning. At this point, I argue, it is the quality of teaching and the quality of learning that is important and how we think about teaching and what teaching means in our schools that needs to change, rather than the order of words (because I have to admit that in my experience those who changed the word order didn’t change their practices, nor did they think any more profoundly about

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them!). The point is that teaching and learning are inextricably linked and assessment for learning lies at the heart of best practice. You do not get one without the other, otherwise we could have a whole school of pupils working independently without the need for teachers (which, of course, we know is absurd), and it really is how we ‘teach’ that needs addressing. For example, we know that lecture-style teaching has little impact on learning, yet you will often see teachers reverting to this style of teaching (mainly for ease and convenience). We also can’t have an environment which is truly independent because we know (if we apply a little bit of common sense) that leaving pupils to discover everything independently won’t work. I admit to liking the phrase ‘to facilitate’ learning, not simply as the latest buzz word but to genuinely mean a situation where the teacher creates an effective learning environment, planning and structuring their lesson to ensure that activities support pupil development, encouraging them to think and to be actively involved in the learning process using assessment to bridge the gap between teaching and learning. We know from experience that meticulously planned lessons do not necessarily mean that pupils will have learnt what we are trying to develop; it is formative assessment that provides this link. It tells us if pupils and teachers are on the right track *during* the learning process; knowing this after the fact is not good enough (largely because we are governed by a content-driven curriculum, which demands we move forwards and often doesn’t allow us the time to spend redoing). ‘In classrooms that use assessment to support learning, teachers continually adapt instruction to meet student needs’ (Leahy *et al.*, 2005).

We must recognise that we cannot make the learning happen. We can only create opportunities that best allow that learning to take place. Assessment for learning is pivotal to this process and occurs at the point of learning when pupils interact with their peers or teacher or when pupils engage in personal reflection in an attempt to think about what they have learnt. So assessment for learning really is implicitly linked in learning to learn (then knowing what to do with it once you have learnt it) and it must not be thought of as an isolated practice in our classrooms. Indeed, OFSTED (OFSTED, 2014a) inspectors must consider whether:

- teaching engages and includes all pupils, with work that is challenging enough and that meets their individual needs, including for the most able pupils;
- pupils’ responses demonstrate sufficient gains in their knowledge, skills and understanding, including of literacy and mathematics;

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- teachers monitor pupils' progress in lessons and use the information well to adapt their teaching;
- teachers use questioning and discussion to assess the effectiveness of their teaching and promote pupils' learning;
- assessment is frequent and accurate and used to set relevant work from the Early Years Foundation Stage onwards;
- pupils understand well how to improve their work;
- all pupils are taught well so that they are properly prepared for the next stage in their learning, including in the Early Years Foundation Stage where the development of their communication, language and literacy skills must equip them well for Key Stage 1.

When evaluating the quality of teaching (OFSTED 2014b), inspectors must further consider the extent to which:

- the teaching in all key stages and subjects promotes pupils' learning and progress across the curriculum;
- teachers have consistently high expectations of pupils;
- teachers improve the quality of learning by systematically and effectively checking pupils' understanding in lessons, and making appropriate interventions;
- reading, writing, communication and mathematics are well taught;
- teachers and other adults create a positive climate for learning in which pupils are interested and engaged;
- marking and constructive feedback from teachers contributes to pupils' learning;
- teaching strategies, including setting appropriate homework, together with support and intervention, match individual needs.

As we progress through this book you will see that each of these aspects inextricably links with assessment for learning and, indeed, assessment for learning underpins best practice and can be seen as a key component to each of the above points.

Summary

I sometimes feel that, in our current educational climate, we are swimming in a sea of new initiatives and that all these serve to do is take our focus off what really matters. The classroom. The heart of any school. The place where learning happens. The place where we can have a real impact on the future. Assessment for learning is integral to creating success in our school system and should form the focus of staff and teacher development in our schools. Without investment in training, teachers will find it an upward challenge and we must support professional development if we are to secure a culture where formative assessment is the norm and is effective, having a measurable impact on how our pupils learn.

In this book, we look at how to develop lessons which incorporate formative assessment without adding to the workload of already busy teachers and I hope that it provides you with confidence to openly discuss assessment for learning practices in your classroom, departments and schools. Remember, the formal definitions are important, but they won't help learners learn. You will. So, as you read this book, think carefully about how you can apply the techniques to your own practice. Remind yourself that just because we plan, it doesn't mean pupils will learn; always keep in mind that assessment for learning bridges the gap between learners learning and teachers teaching.