

Assessment as a learning tool

Reading task 2

Assessment is designed to help the pupil achieve the best possible learning outcomes, he or she is currently capable of. At the same time, the method of assessment should teach pupils self-evaluation and should co-create the pupils' skill and desire to learn throughout their lives.

In a constructivist school - that is, a school in which pupils experience '**participatory learning**' (Neubauer, 2001) - the nature, role and status of assessment in the teaching process changes fundamentally. Assessment does not serve the purpose of controlling and grading pupils but is a tool for learning.

The learner embarks on a journey of knowledge. He/she knows approximately the goal, even if he/she does not have a detailed map that would lead him directly to the goal. His task is to map out for himself a territory that many others have traversed before him, but each has trodden his own unique path. The student does not yet know which will be the right one for him, and everything suggests that he will have to travel many parts of the path in a completely new way. His own path, as the paths of his predecessors fade and disappear. The pupil has been given clues on the way to his destination, but only enough to keep his own path for an adventure. Some parts of the route will be so easy for the pupil that he will travel them alone. On others, he will need the support of his classmates, but together the difficulties they will be able to cope. And on still other sections, there will be challenges that could the path too long or get lost if he were to tackle them alone. Here the stops and hints provided by the teacher in the process will help, which we inaccurately call assessment. We should talk about formative or, better still, descriptive and targeted feedback.

1. Feedback

Feedback is an aid to the pupil's journey of discovery. Provided by the pupil information about how successful his or her efforts have been so far on the journey to the goal, confirms successful steps and corrects setbacks and mistakes. The more focused and more specific the feedback is, the more frequent and timely it is, the greater the chances that the learner will achieve the desired cognitive goals (see Chapter 1.3).

Thus, assessment becomes more important, which can be found in the literature encountered under a number of other terms that overlap with the term formative to a greater or lesser extent, emphasising one aspect of formative assessment more than another (e.g. assessment for learning, continuous assessment, alternative assessment). **Formative assessment** is said to serve primarily the learner (Starý, 2006), and the term 'formative' itself invites such an interpretation. Importantly, in the process of formative assessment, information is not obtained for its further formation, but also the teacher. On the basis of this information, the teacher adapts the teaching so that the pupil can make the best use of the information. Assessment thus becomes a central part of learning (Beach, 1999) - it tells the pupil and the teacher what to do next.

Summative assessment is often seen as externally determined assessment, to stakeholders in learning outcomes other than the teacher and pupil. In our conception, it has summative assessment also has an important role to play in pupil learning: good summative summarises the strengths of a pupil's performance at the end of a particular stage of learning and captures the pupil's further learning needs. Summative assessment should not just be seen as a summative symbol that ranks a pupil or their performance into a particular performance category (grade, letter, smiley face, ...). The pupil should be should always know the details of the level they have achieved. The summative assessment should be accompanied by a more specific description, or be

arranged in such a way that the different components of the pupil's performance are assessed separately. The pupil can then more easily to identify which component of his performance he needs to improve and where he can in which he/she considers his/her performance to be sufficient.

2. The role of assessment

The role of assessment in school has changed fundamentally. Assessment must no longer the need to hide shortcomings or to cheat; it must not discourage or close the way to further learning. The pupil should know that he and the teacher are pursuing a common goal which one cannot achieve without the other. The goal is the greatest possible development of the pupil's knowledge and skills, the greatest possible progress in his understanding of the world and his own place in it. The teacher works with the pupil on a common task and learns himself in the process. Both bear their share of mutual responsibility.

The teacher is more experienced and can therefore facilitate the pupil's learning in many ways. The pupil does not enter into this cooperation as a tabula rasa - what is already in the pupil, strongly influences his learning and understanding. He too has experiences that the teacher knows little about, he has his own needs and interests, his own unique approach to learning, his personal history. Assessment and feedback are the times when pupil and teacher work most closely together. Together, they explore what emerges from the pupil's work to date and for their future learning. They reflect and analyse their experience. It is up to the teacher to suggest and discuss with the pupil what to do next, and it is up to the pupil to embark with full commitment on a new adventure in the journey of discovery. The teacher observes the pupil from a distance, intervenes thoughtfully and rather sporadically, records his observations so that he can discuss them with the pupil at the right moment. The **learning cycle** is iterative and feedback and assessment are a key part of it.

References

Beach, K. (1999). Consequential transitions: A socio-cultural beyond transfer in education. *Review of Research in education*, 24, 101-139.

Starý, K. (2020). *Formative Assessment*. Available at <https://clanky.rvp.cz/clanek/k/g/992/SUMATIVNI-A-FORMATIVNI-HODNOCENI.html>

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