

## **Establish assessment for learning**

### **By sharing learning intentions, pupil self-evaluation and feedback**

#### **Introduction:**

In this essay, I am going to talk about ‘assessment for learning (AfL)’ and the significance of AfL. Furthermore, I’m going to discuss what should I do to implement it in my classroom as a proactive teacher in the future. The discussion on why and how to implement AfL will be based on the literature reviews, and my own observation as a student and a teacher as well. Finally, I am going to put forward my thoughts about sharing learning intentions, pupil’s self-evaluation and giving feedback these three strategies, which may direct my future teaching.

#### **Critical review of literature:**

At the very first, I want to figure out the current situation before going deep into this topic. Biggs (1992) pointed out that schools need to perform two functions, one is to select students for their future allocation on further education, and the other is to promote students’ development by educating. In fact, these two functions are not in balance when being carried out. Because the society do not need so much people with high academic competence or the government cannot offer a universal educational system. As Biggs (1992) stated, schools usually aim at selecting students who have

Author: Wang Zu Yi

Copyright 2005-2013 The Hong Kong Institute of Education  
All rights reserved. [www.ied.edu.hk/aclass/](http://www.ied.edu.hk/aclass/)

the higher competence for further education. Take Hong Kong education system for example, the whole curriculum, teacher's teaching and students learning are concentrated on the next assessment hurdles at all stages. It can be found that backwash is usually applied at the end of primary stage and secondary stage in order to get students prepared for the summative assessment like HKAS or HKAL. Consequently, teachers always leave out the equally meaningful chapters which would not be included in the examinations. As for students, the curriculum partly equals to the assessments because they intend to focus on what may be tested on as Biggs (1992) said. In this way, the assessments are used more to select students by competence. In a word, the literature shows that the assessment of learning (AoL) becomes the main trend in education system nowadays in Hong Kong. Some students would possibly lose their access to more knowledge and opportunities for further development.

The opposite side of AoL is 'assessment for learning (AfL)', which is what we should take seriously nowadays. First of all, I want to figure out the meaning of the topic of this essay 'assessment for learning'. According to ARG (2002), assessment for learning indicates "the process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners and their teachers to decide where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go and how best to get there (p.2)." It can be concluded that AfL is supposed to promote students' learning, and improve them to learn more consistently,

which carry out the second function of schools. William (2009) suggested that AfL can make teachers adjust their teaching constantly with the student's responses and build student's learning routes ahead of time carefully. As for the significance, Biggs (1996) explained that the necessity of AfL under Hong Kong's present situation. Hong Kong becomes 'a fully developed post-industrial society' that needs 'a multiskilled workforce' to assist its running (p.11). So at present the task of school is not to sort them into ability groups according to their present level of achievements, but to educate individual for the development of every individual's potential. In addition, the function of assessment changes to offer students with information on the competence improvement, and help teachers to achieve effective teaching. Therefore, assessment for learning (AfL) is of great significance under the current context and the need for learning and teaching.

Literature also provides us with the approaches to implement AfL. William (2009) stated that effective formative assessment is the key to promote students' learning and development consistently. Therefore, formative assessment becomes a critical element when talking about AfL.

As for the implementation of formative assessment, literature works provide lots of strategies. Firstly, teachers can share learning intentions with students (Clarke, 2001). Students are more motivated, enthusiastic and focused, and they may put themselves

into self-evaluative condition and so on. They can also develop new skills and improve their competence with better understanding of the tasks as Clarke (2001) explained. The second useful strategy of formative assessment is pupil's self-evaluation. It usually appears in the format of questions made by teachers, which link with the learning intention. And students need to answer the self-evaluate questions to reflect their learning. Consequently, the pupil self-evaluation can give pupils can help them figure out their individual difficulties in a more specific way and relatively they may set their own targets. ARG (1999) claimed that the AfL must involve students in order to provide them with information about their progress and their subsequent efforts. One part of this information comes from students' direct reflection on their learning (self-evaluation), and the rest come as feedback from teachers (Clarke, 2001). As the third useful strategy that I think highly of, feedback should lead pupils to recognize their next steps and to carry them out as ARG (1999) suggested. The simple principle for feedback is to focus on the learning intention only and to ignore other features such as spellings (Clarke, 2001).

### **Discussion and Recommendation:**

In this session, I am going to relate my personal observation to literature reviews to discuss the importance of assessment for learning and how to implement it. My observation would mainly focus on the situation in Mainland China and Hong Kong.

As for the social context, I agree with the Biggs (1992) that the education systems are selective, and teaching and learning are all aim at assessments. It is true in my secondary schools. Teachers always said that “This part will be assessed in the college entrance examination, so you should pay special attention to... For next chapter, it will not be assessed and we don’t have enough time, so we have to leave it out.” Sometimes we were disappointed that we would miss some interesting chapters, but soon we would forgot it and throw ourselves into learning for assessment. Some classmates’ learning was very goal-oriented, ignoring the irrelevant knowledge points. Because they knew that every assessments was preparing us for next hurdle and the final college entrance examination would affect or even decide our future life tracks by different competence. However, just like Biggs (1996)’s explanation, the modern society need diversity in people. Furthermore, in my opinion, it is more important to achieve development in individual potential than academic progress. So assessment should motivate their learning and future career instead of constrict them in goal-oriented learning.

In my point of view, the sharing of learning intentions, pupil self evaluation and feedback are the three main strategies which I intend to implement for establishing an “assessment for learning” culture in my future classroom. Firstly, I partly agree that to tell my students the learning intensions at the beginning of a lesson or a unit in order

to increase their concentration and reinforce their understanding as Clarke (2001) explained. In my experience of school attachment this year, I had my first attempt of teaching a class. At the beginning, I told the students ‘Today, we are learning to tell ways to a place using the words of shops and directions.’ In spite of the positive affect mentioned in the literature, I found that some of them may lose interests or felt no need to repeat what they had come across when they got the learning intentions. So, in my point of view, this strategy will be more suitable for students in higher stages (e.g. above p.5) because they may have a better concentration and can make use of learning intention to lead their learning actively. Additionally, I think that success criteria can be given to students together with learning intention to motivate their progress, especially for secondary students.

Secondly, I agree with Clark (2001) that pupil’s self evaluation is quite useful for reflecting their accomplishment and individual difficulties and contributing to further learning. Take my experience as a student for example, in middle school, my teachers always ask us to make a conclusion at the end of a semester. There was no assigned question. So I preferred to reflect on what I learned, what I achieved and what I need to improve. I enjoyed making conclusions because in the process I could discovered what I should keep on and what I should pay more efforts. Compared to self-evaluation, my conclusion was in a broader sense because self-evaluation has a tight link with leaning intension and is supposed to be carried out after one lesson or

one topic. However, I believe conclusion and self-evaluation can both enhance students learning. Hence, as a proactive teacher, I want to put them both into practice. The self-evaluation should be connected with learning intentions and be applied for short term use with one or two assigned questions. This can help me to make adjustment and getting to know students' needs short term. The conclusion can be applied for long term use, with a broad view on everything related to students' learning. In this way, students' two ways of self reflection can contribute to their learning consistently.

Thirdly, in my opinion, feedback is more objective than reflection as an external assistance. I appreciate Clark's (2001) idea that feedback should mainly focus on learning intentions, but actually it is difficult to be accomplished thoroughly. For instance, in my English writing, sometimes my teachers commented on my use of vocabulary, grammar and the completion of requirement as well. As a result, I could not understand which part is my shortage in writing and whether my expression on certain topic is good. But I could notice the mistakes with my language. If the teacher use the method suggested by Clark (2001), language mistakes would not be pointed out if it is not the learning intension and they may keep on in the future writing. After thinking about my experience and the literature review, I get a new approach on the aspect of feedback to achieve AfL. As for the learning intentions, teacher can give feedback and adjust the next step teaching according to students performances. As for

the other features other than learning intentions, peer feedback can be applied because students can consolidate their language use in the process of giving feedback to others' work.

### **Conclusion:**

As for the recommendation for AfL, I believe the reflection from personal experience as well as observation, and reading from literature are two main useful approaches. I recommend teachers to share the learning intentions with students of higher levels, making students have reflection in both short term and long term, and finally implement teacher feedback and peer feedback.

(Words count: 1820)

### **References:**

Author: Wang Zu Yi

Copyright 2005-2013 The Hong Kong Institute of Education  
All rights reserved. [www.ied.edu.hk/aclass/](http://www.ied.edu.hk/aclass/)



Assessment Reform Group (ARG) (1999). *Assessment for Learning: Beyond the Black Box*. Cambridge: University of Cambridge School of Education.

Assessment Reform Group (ARG) (2002). *Assessment for Learning: 10 Principles*. Institute of Education, University of London.

Biggs, J.B. (1996). The Assessment scene in Hong Kong. In J. Biggs.(Eds.) *Testing: to educate or to select?: education in Hong Kong at the crossroads*. Hong Kong : Hong Kong Educational Publishing Co.

Biggs, J.B. (1992). *The psychology of assessment and the Hong Kong scene*. Bulletin of the Hong Kong Psychological Society, Nos. 27/28, 1-21.

Clarke, S. (2001). *Unlocking formative assessment. : practical strategies for enhancing pupils' learning in the primary classroom*. London: Hodder & Stoughton Educational

William, D. (2009). *Assessment for learning: Why, What and How?* Institute of Education, University of London.