

As a prospective teacher in primary/secondary schools, how would you go about establishing an “assessment for learning” culture in your classroom?

## **1. Introduction**

According to a report published by the Curriculum Development Council (2002), it is suggested that there should be “a change in the practice of assessment, and schools should emphasize more on assessment for learning” (p.1). Teachers are expected to identify and diagnose students’ difficulties in learning, and provide quality feedback to them (CDC, 2002). This paper is about establishing an “assessment for learning” culture in classroom. In this paper, it is focused on two aspects of “assessment of teaching”—formative assessment and giving quality feedback, but the main purpose of this paper is to evaluate the effectiveness of such model establishing in classroom as a prospective teacher with literature support and my personal experience.

## **2. Critical review of literature**

Assessment is “a practice of collecting evidence of student learning that “should be designed to assess what students are expected to learn” (Education Bureau, 2010). It is an integral part of a curriculum. In 2002, the Curriculum Development Council suggested that schools should emphasize more on “assessment for learning”. It is a process where teachers should “seek to identify and diagnose student learning problems and provide quality feedback for students on how to improve their work”

(Education Commission, 2002, p.1). That is, it focuses on deciding the kinds of actions that should be made in order to help improve both teaching and learning. The assessments are therefore seen as a contributor of better teaching and learning.

“Assessment for learning” also aims at facilitating students to learn through different modes of assessment (Berry, 2008). Different modes of assessments help to evaluate students’ performances in different perspectives. However, it is important that the assessments are carefully designed and aligned with the purpose of learning.

Assessments that are well-designed can provide a “valid” and “reliable judgments” for teachers to evaluate their teaching effectiveness, and students to evaluate their understanding of the learning contents (Berry, 2008, p.48).

In the past, summative assessment was the major method for accessing products of learning. Summative assessment is “the terminal measurement of performance at the end of the instruction” and is usually conducted at the end of the learning and teaching process (Riding and Butterfield, 1990, p.228). Examples of summative assessment are final examination and mid-term tests. Although summative assessment is useful for proving students’ product of learning, multidimensional methods should be used to assess students’ product of learning instead. According to Berry (2008), it is not advisable to “base end of term decisions about learning on a single source of evidence” (p.7). That is, it may be more effective if students’ products of learning are being evaluated through different kinds of assessment methods, such as projects and portfolios, throughout the school year. Thus, formative assessment is recommended to be established in classrooms in the model of “assessment for learning”.

Formative assessment is essential when establishing “assessment for learning” culture in classroom. It can be carried out informally or formally in daily classroom learning and teaching throughout the school year, and that the main purpose of it is to feedback learning and teaching (Education Bureau, 2010). As it will be accessing throughout the school year, teachers can be more effective in diagnosing and identifying students’ learning problems. It is said that frequent homework, short tests, and exercises are preferred than infrequent ones since “any new learning should first be tested within about a week of first encounter” (Black and Wiliam, 1998, p.8). Therefore, frequent assessments on students should be conducted to ensure effective learning.

In the model of “assessment for learning”, assessments should be interactive and should not be only conducted by teachers (Berry, 2008). Peer-assessments and self-assessments are other kinds of formative assessments which are essential in students’ learning process. It is important to establish “students’ ownership of learning” (Berry, 2008, p.16). Students will then be able to make judgements about their own work, monitor their progress of learning and then set goals for them to improve through self-assessment. Well-constructed self-assessment is helpful in providing precious learning experiences and encouraging lifelong learning (Berry, 2008).

Giving quality feedback to students in classroom is another crucial action in the concept of “assessment for learning” as it helps improve students’ learning. It is said that frequent assessment feedback helps both teachers and students to enhance their

teaching and learning (Fuchs et al., 1997). Feedback is important because students may not benefit from assessments if they are given only marks or grades (Black and Wiliam, 1998). Feedback enables students to know their strengths and weaknesses and help them to make improvements. There are different types of feedback such as learning feedback, evaluation feedback and motivational feedback (Berry, 2005). Learning feedback is most consistent with the model of “assessment for learning”. Learning feedback is in a form which “provides students with information on how to improve their learning” (Berry, 2008, p.132). That is, it gives further explanation to students of why they are good or provide suggestions. This kind of quality feedback is important to students because they can set goals or make better learning decisions with reference to the feedback given to them.

### **3. Discussion**

#### **3.1 Giving quality feedback**

Giving timely and comprehensive feedback on students’ performances in classroom is important in the progress of students’ learning. However, feedback should be given in an appropriate and informative way. Effective learning feedback helps students reduce “the discrepancies between their desired and actual levels of performance” (Berry, 2008, p.135). When I try to give feedbacks during block practice next year, I should give feedback in an informative way. Also, it has to be adequate with specific details (Berry, 2008). That is, I should give students directions and specify on how they should improve their work. For instance, when giving

feedback to a student whose composition lacks the use of adjectives to describe the characters, I may comment by saying ‘you have included a lot of interesting characters in the story! Well done! To make the characters more vivid, you could use more adjectives to describe them. For example, the girl is quite naughty because she bullied other students in the story, isn’t she? You may consider adding adjectives to other characters.’ This is a kind of learning feedback. It has explained to the student of how she can make the characters more vivid which is by adding more adjectives, and provided her with an example to show how she can improve on her piece of composition.

Other than written comment, immediate feedback to individuals’ performance on task during class is crucial. Feedback should be given “as soon after the learning activity as possible” (Berry, 2008, p.135). For instance, there had been times when comments of my English oral practice were given on the next day, instead of during the lesson which I did the practice, in secondary schools. The delayed feedback has less effect on me in terms of improving my learning because I might have already moved on and forgot my performance in detail. It would have been more effective if I could receive immediate feedback. Therefore, immediate feedback should be given to students to facilitate their learning.

### **3.2 Formative assessment**

In the model of “assessment for learning”, it emphasizes on using “multidimensional methods” to continuously assess students’ product of learning throughout the year (Berry, 2008, p.7). Some of the examples of assessment methods

are portfolios, project work, learning journal, self-assessment and peer-assessment. According to Black and Wiliam (2001), pupils should be “trained in self assessment to understand the main objectives of their learning” (p.7). Self-assessment can allow students to take part in their own assessment process. Black & Wiliam (1998) states that the self-assessment skills that students learned and applied can enhance their achievements. It is effective if students can compare their work with the exemplars provided by teachers. For instance, outstanding literature essays of my classmates were provided to me when I was in secondary school. I was asked to generate my own descriptive feedback by comparing my essays with the outstanding ones. It is effective because I can learn from my classmates’ strengths in terms of organization and elaboration skills. Doing self-assessment enables me to establish self- assessing and independent learning ability (Berry, 2008). In the perspective of teachers, students’ learning problems can also be reflected through their self-assessment forms. Teachers can then adjust the teaching objectives or teaching approach focusing on students’ strengths and weaknesses in the following lessons.

Other than self-assessments, doing project works can also help students to reflect on their learning, and teachers to identify students’ problems in the process of doing the project. According to Berry (2008), “learning is embedded in the doing of the project” (p.92). Students can learn on the process, the product or both when doing project. For instance, I may make the assessment focus of the project accessible for students, so that students can access and reflect on their own work before presenting in class. It may also be a kind of peer-assessment if students evaluate on one another’s

performance of presentation in terms of content, presentation skills and interactivity with audience. It is said that peer-assessment is one of the best ways to operationalise the principles of formative assessment (Noonan and Duncan, 2005). It enhances social interaction between learners (Frankland, 2007). Students being assessed can improve on their weaknesses and keep up with their strengths, and students assessing the performance can learn from the assessed students' strengths and avoid making the same mistakes as them.

#### **4. Recommendation**

In order to establish “assessment for learning” successfully and effectively in classroom, I, as a prospective teacher, should let students know clearly about the assessment criteria and rubrics. One of the aims of “assessment for learning” is to enable students to learn from quality feedbacks provided by teachers. The marking criteria must be made clear to students. As the feedback is made based on the marking criteria, “students’ efforts to improve would be haphazard” if the marking criteria is not presented to students (Berry, 2008, p.135). Students can then find ways to improve their weaknesses by matching the feedback with the marking criteria.

In order to let students feel comfortable with receiving feedback and avoid labeling, feedback provided should avoid comparisons with other pupils. According to Black and Wiliam (2001), “pupils can accept and work with quality feedback, provided that they are not clouded by overtones about ability, competition and comparison with others” (p.6). Therefore, I should only give feedback that is about

strengths and weaknesses of students' work and how they can improve.

## **5. Conclusion**

“Assessment for learning” is beneficial to students because assessment should be treated as “a catalyst to learning”, rather than “a tool to measure students’ success” (Berry, 2008, p.19). Through giving quality feedback and having multidimensional formative assessments in classroom, it is advantageous to both students’ learning and teachers’ teaching. It does not only give students ownership of learning by requiring students to reflect on their learning and monitor their own learning, but also enhance the relationship between students and teachers through interacting. Therefore, “assessment for learning” is worth establishing in classrooms.

## **Reference**

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