

Key Competences Conference

Formative Assessment: Assessment for Learning

Workshop Leaders:
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Improving Formative Assessment Project (IFA)

Partnership:

- Universities of Brighton, Exeter and Oxford-Brookes
- NRDC
- LSN
- NIACE

Informed by work of Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam (the 'Black Box' studies)

Key findings of the Black Box research studies

- The most effective way to improve learner attainment is to increase and improve the use of formative assessment approaches in teaching and learning
- In systems which put a strong emphasis on the outcomes of summative assessment (achievement rates, league tables, etc), teachers are inhibited from using formative assessment approaches
- Formative assessment approaches in teaching and learning are particularly helpful for less confident learners

Aims of the project

- Promote new insights and evidence about the links between formative assessment and students' motivation and achievement
- Highlight factors that help or hinder change
- Identify possibilities for development
- Promote better motivation and achievement
- Disseminate ideas and findings

Fieldwork

- Settings:
FT vocational programmes at Key Stage 4 and post-16, E2E, and PT Literacy, Language and Numeracy (LLN) provision for adults
- 2 phases: 2005/2006 and 2006/2007
- LLN Fieldwork Sites:
Year 1: Rural midlands and urban South (Literacy and Numeracy)
Year 2: South and Southwest, Literacy, Numeracy and ESOL
- About 60 teachers and 200 students altogether

Fieldwork

- Initial questionnaire to learners and teachers
- Development programme: workshops
- Teachers develop formative assessment practice
- Classroom observations
- Final interviews and questionnaires

Tutors' interventions

- Students drawing up own assignment criteria
- Students devising own marking schemes
- More reflective recording of learning
- Developing questioning techniques
- Less teacher talking time, more student talking time
- More emphasis on peer and self-assessment

What's emerging?

- The 'spirit' and the 'letter' – sustainable versus instrumental learning
- Transmission, transaction, transformation
- The concept of 'learning culture'

What factors seem to help 'sustainable' formative assessment?

- A strong, confident sense of subject
- An institutional ethos that combines goals for achievement with sustainable learning
- High quality teacher training
- An opportunity for teachers to share ideas and practices away from the pressure of targets.

Emerging messages for organisations

- Teachers have widely varying or even contradictory levels of understanding of formative assessment
- Confusion about FA at policy level, and pressure to achieve short-term targets, produces a tension between the 'spirit' and the 'letter' of formative assessment: in current contexts of strongly-regulated assessment systems, formative assessment can easily revert to continuous summative assessment against pre-defined individualised learning targets

Emerging messages for teachers 1

- Learning should be structured as constructive dialogue, focussing on skills, knowledge, real-life contexts, and success criteria
- Teachers need to use and model the highest levels of communication skills
- Feedback should focus on the task, not the person. Grades or marks are liable to demotivate less confident learners
- Classroom questioning is a key pedagogic skill for teachers. Different kinds of question can either support or inhibit learning
- Summative assessment activities can be used for formative purposes

Emerging messages for teachers 2

- Teachers' behaviour is critical for creating an atmosphere for learning in which learners feel relaxed in the group and able to take risks, ask questions, admit ignorance, etc.
- Self- and peer-assessment activities are strongly correlated with successful learning, but students need to be carefully prepared for them
- Exercises and classroom discussions about success criteria, and the design of assessment tasks, are strongly correlated with successful learning. These activities can promote confidence, motivation, autonomy, and citizenship

Improving Formative Assessment

- For more information about the project, go to:
<http://www.brookes.ac.uk/schools/education/staffinfo/eccleston-FAproject.html>
- Or email:
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