

How can assessment help learners take control of their learning?

Independent evidence

Assessment for learning (AfL) motivates students to take control of their own learning and enables them to gain more confidence and skills so that they become expert learners. AfL involves tutors and learners working together to identify what the learner knows already and what the next targets for learning should be. An important first step towards AfL is to create a culture change in the classroom, as a learning and staff development manager of a college explained:

'With peer assessment, for example, I worked hard to remove the climate of fear and embarrassment that is usually caused by putting your work in the public domain for others to scrutinise' i.

Your evidence and reflection

How far does your assessment practice help students to build on what they know already and identify what they need to do next? The following represent a number of well-established AfL practices. Do you use any of these approaches? If so which one - and how often?

- Using questioning that probes students' understanding, such as *What would happen if...? Can you think of another situation in which...? etc.*
- Comment only marking that helps students identify what they need to do next rather than putting a mark or grade on their work.
- Sharing assessment criteria with students to help them understand what counts as success.
- Peer-assessment which helps students learn how to give and take constructive criticism and advice that will help them to progress.

You may also want to consider what your students expect from your assessment practice. You could do this by asking them what they do and do not find helpful. Alternatively, you could ask a colleague to carry out this stage in order to ensure more independent responses from your students.

Putting the evidence to work

Once you have analysed your practice and your students' responses to it, you can plan ways to make your assessment more formative about their learning. You could try to use probing questions more often in order to encourage your students to think about their work in greater depth. This approach also has the advantage that it models questions they could ask each other. Could you identify pairs of students who could read each other's work and discuss what they have written as a way of introducing them to peer-assessment?

i Find out more in: Sachdev, D., Perez-del-Aguila, R., Meyer, B., & Macleod, D. (2007) Personalisation Literature Review. Learning and Skills Network.

For more information on the impact of different modes of assessment see this report:
www.itselfjibutnotasweknowit.org.uk/files/AssessmentModesImpact.pdf