

Section B: Embedding Formative Assessment

Unit 1: So what are the pupils doing?

Overview

This unit looks at the issues involved in embedding formative assessment in everyday classroom practice. It suggests that the process of embedding formative assessment is less about teachers learning more teaching strategies than it is about finding ways of giving pupils greater responsibility for their own learning. Emphasising the importance of self-assessment by pupils as a vehicle for achieving this, it examines how teachers can develop their own understanding and use of formative assessment to help pupils become more actively involved in their own learning. In practical terms, this will involve teachers developing approaches to peer assessment in order to allow pupils to reflect on what they are learning and their progress in doing so, by developing their own skills in discussion and feedback.

Preparatory evaluation

This section can be introduced with “Exploring Prior Learning”, an optional short session which can help participants to evaluate their existing understanding and use of assessment for learning.

Pre-reading

The discussion paper, “Embedding Formative Assessment: so what are the pupils doing?” provides a short overview of the issues involved in embedding formative assessment in classroom practice. A brief opening session to allow discussion of responses to the paper may help participants to focus their thoughts before embarking on the work covered in this section.

Session 1 Principles before practice

The aim of this session is to explore the usefulness of the principles of participation, dialogue, engagement and thinking in providing a framework within which the practice of classroom assessment can be developed.

Activity 1: Exploring the principles

Session 2 The purpose of assessment in the classroom

This session encourages teachers to recognise the real purpose of formative assessment, not in improving teaching as an end in itself, but in improving learning by helping pupils to take more responsibility for their own progress through the development of peer and self-assessment.

Activity 2: Beliefs and classroom practice

Session 3 The evolution of good teaching:

Being explicit about learning

Gathering evidence of learning

Focusing feedback on improvement

This session presents formative assessment as a sequence of the three processes set out above, each of which has a specific purpose intended to support an aspect of effective learning. These processes serve as ‘organisers’ within which participants can develop their own understanding of the many strategies associated with formative assessment.

Activity 3: Exploring formative assessment

Session 4 Self-assessment in practice:

Handing on responsibility for learning

This session suggests that self-assessment by pupils may be best developed by teachers helping pupils to learn how to use the three processes explored in session 3 and then practise the skills involved through peer-assessment opportunities in the classroom.

Activity 4: Reflecting on practice