

## Section C: Extending Formative Assessment

### Unit 1: Around the AifL triangle

#### Presentation notes

##### Slide 1

This seminar presentation has been designed to provide an opportunity to discuss some of the issues involved in extending the principles and practice of formative assessment to develop meaningful connections with the other two aspects of Assessment is for Learning: personal learning planning (Assessment as Learning) and local moderation (Assessment of Learning).

##### Slide 2

This slide uses the AifL triangle to introduce the overall purpose of the work covered in the presentation. Assessment is presented as an activity that can be developed to provide a role for pupils in managing their own learning and for schools in monitoring progress. In developing the use of assessment in this way, we need to think about the three aspects of the triangle and how assessment for learning can be used to build an effective foundation for this. The four sessions are designed to explore this in a coherent and progressive way.

The first session looks at assessing learning and provides a broad overview of the principles underpinning formative assessment, together with an attempt to draw together the various elements of formative assessment into a coherent and unified approach to assessment in the classroom.

The second session explores what is involved in seeking to stimulate and support independent learning by pupils while the third and fourth use the statements around the AifL triangle as a foundation for developing an approach to assessment as and of learning (personal learning planning and local moderation).

##### Slide 3

The quotation was used at the end of the first session in the Highland Council Learning and Teaching Reflection Framework. It can be used here to catch up on some of what's been tried or learned since the last session or alternatively as an introductory discussion point to examine existing approaches and practices.

Many people find it difficult to think about doing things differently. Change can be resisted in different ways: downright rejection (no chance!) and passive accommodation (I'm doing that anyway) are just two of the many ways in which people respond to the prospect of change. People are more likely to find they can contemplate change if they are aware of a need which present circumstances cannot meet.

This quotation many offer a context in which that can be discussed, particularly when considered in the light of A Curriculum for Excellence. A useful way of exploring the quotation is to think about a 'well-managed' classroom as being one focused essentially on what might be called good teaching without taking full account of the importance of pupils being engaged in their own learning while a 'transformation seeking' classroom is one which is focused first and foremost on creating an environment in which good learning can take place.

#### Session 1 Assessing learning

##### Slide 4

Until recently, we have tended to see assessment as the culmination of a period of instruction of some kind. Whether a national test or some high-stakes external exam, the focus of assessment has been on measuring

the end result of a learning process through some kind of summative assessment, usually a test or an exam.

Assessment for Learning aims to shift the emphasis from this to greater use of classroom assessment that promotes learning. In seeking to develop a better balance between assessment of and for learning, the starting point for many has been formative assessment, especially learning how to use different strategies that can clarify what's to be learned, and to help pupils' progress by providing better feedback. However, in developing an effective approach to classroom assessment, teachers also need to reflect on the underlying principles which can make these strategies so valuable in stimulating and supporting pupils' learning.

#### Slide 5

Inside the Black Box by Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam is the starting point for many in exploring assessment for learning. A short pamphlet, it has very little to say about classroom strategies like traffic-lighting or two stars and a wish.

Instead, it asks three basic questions about the evidence that formative assessment raises attainment, that it is being used effectively and that its use can be improved. In answering these questions, it concludes that formative assessment can produce dramatic and substantial improvements, that it is not used as well as it might be and that there are many ways to improve that use.

Many people see formative assessment as a set of teaching strategies. Black and Wiliam present it not as assessment to improve teaching but as a means to the more important end of helping pupils to engage more effectively in their own learning. This slide sets out, in order of their coverage in Inside the Black Box, the three areas most in need of improvement if the attainment gains possible with formative assessment are to be realised.

#### Slide 6

This slide encapsulates different elements in using assessment for learning emphasising the importance of purposeful classroom dialogue involving teachers and pupils working together to develop a capacity for thoughtful reflection useful throughout AifL and ACfE. The ideas of the reflective professional and the thinking child involved in different kinds of purposeful dialogue with one another will be a familiar feature of Highland Council's approach to both AifL and ACfE.

#### Slide 7

This slide provides an opportunity to think about what we might look for in a classroom where such purposeful interaction between teacher and pupils is taking place.

Participation can't really happen without the teacher deliberately encouraging it. Extensive evidence of meaningful dialogue, teacher to pupil, pupil to pupil, pupil to teacher is likely to be a particularly strong feature. Pupils' greater engagement in their own learning will constitute an important outcome, and thinking by all the participants in relation to all aspects of classroom activity will be a common occurrence.

#### Slide 8

The underpinning principles of participation, dialogue, engagement and thinking can be used in different ways to foster a deeper understanding of the role formative assessment can play in improving learning in the classroom.

For example, this slide presents engagement as an objective for pupils which they can achieve through purposeful thinking. An effective way in which a teacher could promote pupils' thinking and engagement would be to make greater use of different forms of dialogue to stimulate and sustain their participation in classroom activities.

Discussion around these four principles can help teachers to see formative assessment and other aspects of AifL as a unified

approach to assessment which develops it as both an essential part of everyday classroom practice and a way of evaluating learning at the end of the process.

#### Slide 9

This slide explores the findings published in 1989 by D Royce Sadler into the essential characteristics of formative assessment. The idea of learners perceiving a gap and then taking steps to close it emphasises the importance of their involvement in the process. It provides a specific explanation of the reason why the teacher cannot learn for a pupil. That has to be the pupil's job - the teacher needs to concentrate on creating for the pupil an opportunity to reach the objective, on stimulating the desire to learn and then supporting the process.

#### Slide 10

If formative assessment is really about enabling learning by removing barriers preventing pupils' access to it and then developing their capacity for self-assessment, we may need to rethink how we approach the four aspects of classroom practice we tend to associate with it: sharing learning intentions and success criteria; using questions; giving feedback; using peer and self-assessment.

If the development of self-assessment is the ultimate objective, peer assessment opportunities in the classroom will provide the training ground, and teaching practices and procedures need to model in a meaningful way what's involved. So, if classroom assessment is to become an integral part of teaching and learning, it may help to think about it not as collections of strategies under four headings but as the three essential aspects of practice illustrated here.

This slide explores how that can be placed within the framework set out by D Royce Sadler (1989) and which is now seen as a defining account of the steps involved in using formative assessment.

#### Slide 11

This slide looks at a likely progression through the teacher's use of formative assessment both to shape the process of learning and to create a kind of scaffold within which pupils can learn and develop the skills they will use in reflecting on and regulating their own learning. How teachers use formative assessment approaches to support a class-full of pupils is remarkably similar to how an individual pupil can successfully manage their own learning plan. Both will set a learning objective and some success criteria; both will identify activities likely to overtake the objective; and both will look for evidence of success further into the process.

When teachers come to recognise that the features of good classroom assessment are also the hallmarks of good self-assessment and personal learning planning, they will have taken an important step in extending formative assessment into other aspects of AifL.

#### Slide 12

##### Activity 1

This activity can be developed using Think, Pair, Share. First establish groups of at least six participants. Next, ask everyone to gather their own experiences of using peer and self-assessment in the classroom. After a couple of minutes, ask two (or three) group members to join up and share their thoughts. Then encourage the whole group to share ideas, and reflect on how they might set about improving the way they encourage peer and self-assessment by their pupils. Any interesting ideas can then be harvested during a final summing up.

#### Session 2

##### Independent learning

#### Slide 13

This session has been designed to look at some of the issues involved in encouraging pupils to take greater responsibility for their own learning. In part, it's about practical things, about what teachers and pupils do in

the classroom. More importantly it's about the beliefs and values that they bring into the classroom. Session 2 focuses on the importance of exploring how a better understanding of *who I am* and *what I think* is essential if teachers and pupils are to use the principles and practice of formative assessment to greatest effect.

#### Slide 14

Carol Dweck's work spans social and developmental psychology and examines the self-conceptions people use to structure their perceptions of who they are and to guide their behaviour. Her research looks at the origins of these self-concepts, their role in motivation and self-regulation, and their impact on achievement and interpersonal processes. She is currently a professor of psychology at Stanford University.

#### Slide 15

Much of Carol Dweck's work has been with children and young people in an educational context. She has been particularly interested in exploring the impact of self-conceptions about intelligence on peoples' motivation to learn. Over more than thirty years, her research has provided a rich seam of insight and advice into what self-conceptions are, how they affect behaviour and how they can be influenced by external interventions, for example, by teachers.

#### Slide 16

Carol Dweck's research is summed up in this slide. People tend to think of their own intelligence as being either 'fixed' (I've only been given so much and there's not much I can do to change that) or 'incremental' (I can make myself cleverer by trying harder). These mindsets have a major impact on how we respond to the difficulties that we face in learning (and in life). Her work even raises questions about the importance we attach to confidence, suggesting that confidence in individuals with a fixed mindset is much less stable than in those with an incremental mindset.

#### Slide 17

One of the most significant aspects of Carol Dweck's work is that she provides teachers with a rationale and a role in helping children and young people to reconsider their beliefs about their own intelligence. She has used role models like Thomas Edison (who had around 2000 failed attempts before creating light with electricity) to show that, with effort, failure is really just the pathway to success.

The items on the slide offer various ways in which teachers can intervene to counteract the debilitating effects of a pupil's fixed mindset. It's worth noting that all such interventions are valid for all pupils, regardless of ability.

#### Slide 18

The following slides in this session (18 to 26) set out important elements in developing independent learning in the classroom.

Slide 18 identifies the first step as the teacher establishing a safe climate in the classroom important if a shift in the balance of power from teacher to pupils is to be achieved.

#### Slide 19

In essence, a safe classroom climate is one in which everyone firmly believes that mistakes are good because they provide an opportunity for learning, and that no-one risks any kind of ridicule when they share their thoughts with others. This may well involve a fundamental shift in the relationship between teacher and pupils because it depends upon high levels of collaboration and low tolerance of competitive behaviour from everyone.

If the teacher is no longer arbiter of what's right or wrong and pupils have the freedom to explore their ideas without being afraid to express them, then the opportunities for participation and two way dialogue are likely to grow.

## Slide 20

This slide and the next one look at some of the things that can happen when the emphasis on success is too strong. Even quite able children can go to great lengths to avoid looking stupid, rather than simply acknowledging misunderstandings and focusing their efforts on correcting them.

These are useful discussion points, not least because ability is so often seen as the most important way of distinguishing one pupil from another. They also provide an opportunity to think about some of the 'hidden' effects of too great a dependence on testing in trying to measure learning.

## Slide 21

This slide continues to explore the perceived importance of ability which can have a corrosive effect on the prospect of improvement for many learners. Evidence suggests that even very able learners can opt out of challenging learning opportunities for fear of failure and loss of perceived status.

Again, this is a useful discussion point if there is time to pursue it. Whenever assessment of learning consists mainly of setting tests and examinations, we tend to see ability as a major determinant of success. As a result, only the best are applauded for doing well.

By overemphasising ability in this way, we can also close down opportunities for the rest, who could well taste success, too, if only they understood that effort mattered more than ability in achieving it.

## Slide 22

The next two steps in helping learners to take more responsibility for their own learning are about how the principles and practice of assessment for learning are developed as part of a consistent and coherent approach to classroom assessment. In short, to take more responsibility, pupils need a clear understanding of what they are learning and what success will look like and they (and their teacher) need to use

observation and questions to gather evidence of the learning that's going on so that they can focus their feedback on what now needs to be done to make improvements.

## Slide 23

Developing an approach to classroom assessment based on a clearer understanding of the underpinning principles has been explored in greater detail in an earlier part of the CPD Reflection Framework. This slide provides a brief overview of the main elements and an opportunity to discuss developments in understanding and/or practice.

## Slide 24

While Black and Wiliam are quite clear that improved use of formative assessment by teachers is essential in the evolution of good teaching, good teaching is not the final objective. Rather, the purpose of good teaching should be to stimulate and support assessment by pupils as an effective way of raising attainment for all. This understanding of the role of pupil assessment goes beyond the adoption of a few suitable strategies. It requires effort and persistence by teachers and their pupils in developing a coherent and sustainable approach to peer assessment in the classroom that allows pupils to work with one another in learning and practising the skills involved.

## Slide 25

Pupil assessment in the classroom can be developed in many different ways and examples of these can be found in other parts of the Highland Council CPD Reflection Framework. This slide identifies some of the more common approaches and offers a starting point for discussion and experimentation.

## Slide 26

The final step in this series of slides presents self-assessment (and personal learning planning) as a natural outcome of the preceding four steps. That is not to say that its development is easy because many

hurdles may need to be overcome. It does suggest that the development is progressive, depending on a clear sequencing of effort: priority one - reduce pupils' fear of failure by encouraging them to see mistakes as an opportunity to learn something new. (Carol Dweck)

priority two - make sure pupils know what they are being asked to learn and hand over some of the responsibility for learning it by ensuring that classroom interaction and dialogue is open and focussed on how to improve.

priority three - structure pupils' involvement in assessment by developing their understanding of its role in helping them to think about their own learning, and providing opportunities for them to develop their own good practice.

priority four - build on earlier work to develop self-assessment as a personal and sustainable approach to managing learning.

#### Slide 27

##### Activity 2

This activity provides an opportunity to discuss a number of peer and self-assessment strategies in the context of earlier parts of the discussion. Participants could break into groups and first spend a few minutes reading through the descriptions. Then each member of the discussion group could identify in turn one strategy to talk about. This could involve describing how the strategy has been used in the classroom and an evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses. Alternatively, it could involve saying that it would be interesting to explore the strategy further in a classroom context and explaining why, or it could involve saying why it just wouldn't work. Once again, a final session could be used to collect some preferred strategies for further exploration by the group, department or staff.

### Session 3

#### Personal planning

##### Slide 28

The third session brings the ideas explored in the first two sessions to bear on what's involved in helping pupils to take greater responsibility for their own learning in the longer term.

##### Slide 29

Returning to the work of Royce Sadler (who introduced the idea of closing the gap between a pupil's present state and a perceived learning goal - see slide 8), this observation lets us reflect on what personal learning planning is and isn't.

In the argument between personal learning plans and personal learning planning, the importance of the product (plans) has declined while the role of the process (planning) has attracted a growing consensus. This quotation explores some of the reasons why this is so, as well as identifying some of the purposes, activities and capacities the process should be promoting. Some discussion around these ideas may help to clarify that personal learning planning should be flexible, able to accommodate different learning needs.

##### Slide 30

This and the next three slides are taken from the AifL Toolkit, published by Learning and Teaching Scotland. Together, they present personal learning planning (assessment as learning) as essentially an extension of the principles and practice of formative assessment.

In the toolkit, practising self and peer assessment is located at the top of the triangle, on the side reserved for assessment as learning. In itself, this should be clear enough indication of the importance attached to peer and self-assessment in developing an approach to personal learning planning.

Setting one's own learning goals could be regarded as essentially identifying and adopting learning intentions and success criteria in a personal learning context. Similarly, identifying and reflecting on the evidence of one's own learning refers to how personal learning can be evaluated and directed.

In providing an opportunity to explore these three aspects of personal learning planning, the AifL Toolkit identifies several areas for closer investigation which are presented in the next three slides.

#### Slide 31

These five questions focus on the importance that should be attached to self and peer assessment in everyday school life for pupils and teachers. As with assessment for learning, school and self-evaluation around these questions is probably best carried out in two stages. The first stage could be to collect and reflect on evidence of actual school and classroom practice in each of the areas under consideration, and the second stage could then be about areas that would benefit from further development.

#### Slide 32

The questions raised here focus around the involvement of pupils in identifying their own learning priorities. A similar approach is relevant for teachers as learners, too. This could be shaped around personal CPD opportunities, involvement in school, stage or department developments and the like.

Again, an approach based on gathering and interpreting evidence, then identifying next steps is likely to produce some well considered conclusions.

#### Slide 33

The emphasis here on an evidence-based reflection process for staff and pupils is at the heart of many studies of both the role of assessment in learning and the management of change in education.

These questions provide four ways into broader discussions around the role of evidence in informing improvement at both the personal (pupils and teachers) and the institutional level.

Throughout the conversations that these questions may provoke, views about appropriate products (recording learning plans and outcomes) and even suitable processes (to accommodate different ages, stages and capabilities) are likely to change, depending on specific circumstances. That's not a problem so long as any outcome of a discussion is fit for purpose in taking things forward.

#### Slide 34

Having accepted that there's no one way of approaching personal learning planning, this slide sets out some likely features of the process.

First of all, just a few priorities at any time will be enough for anyone. The idea that children and young people will be able to stay focussed on much more than that is pretty unrealistic and, over time, there will be opportunities for other priorities to be identified and addressed.

A plan for shaping any specific priority is most likely to begin with some idea of what needs to be done and how. Other factors like evidence and feedback will also play a role in managing the process just as they do in the use of formative assessment to guide learning in the classroom.

These four steps (or others) could form the basis for conversations between pupils, their teachers and parents to help shape an identifiable learning priority which may or may not be part of the formal curriculum. Clearly, if a pupil identifies some priority that is closely related to an aspect of the curriculum they are following, then the school is likely to be able to offer material support if necessary; alternatively, many young people have interests beyond school which their teachers know little or nothing about. There is no reason why the school

should feel it has to provide support in areas where it has little to offer in terms of expertise or resources; neither, however, should it feel that it has no interest in helping to ensure that young people have a good chance of realising their ambitions, big or small.

Control of the planning process will be most effective and valuable in the hands of the planner, not the school. If personal learning planning emerges as formative assessment is embedded in classroom practice, and pupils have learned how to assess their own progress, then that is not likely to be a problem.

Looking at it from a viewpoint where personal learning planning may not be particularly familiar, this may seem optimistic or unrealistic. On the other hand, there is enough evidence now to suggest that when children and young people learn how to take greater responsibility for their own learning, they become more engaged and effective learners.

#### Slide 35

##### Activity 3

Using the outcome of the previous activity as a starting point, what would you need to do to ensure that your efforts to develop pupil self-evaluation:

- become embedded in your practice
- are used effectively by pupils to create a meaningful context for self-evaluation
- offer consistency in the pupils' experience in your stage/department and the school?

This is really about developing a school approach to personal learning planning. In small groups and using the discussions that have already taken place, participants can begin to think what a coherent and consistent whole school approach to personal learning planning might look like. If the four stages described in the previous slide attracted some broad agreement as a starting point, they could provide a general framework in which to develop an approach:

- 1 the objective is to develop pupil self-evaluation
- 2 how might we achieve it?
- 3 how will we assess progress and what kind of evidence will we need to help us do that?
- 4 how will we use evidence gathered to monitor progress towards our objective?

Small group discussions using an 'agenda' like this could provide a starting point for a whole school approach.

## Session 4

### Evaluating evidence

#### Slide 36

This session introduces the third side of the AifL triangle, assessment of learning using moderated teacher judgements. This is a less familiar part of AifL, the part which can be mistaken as an orphan because the connection between it and the other parts of the AifL family are less clearly understood. Yet, if the assessment approaches adopted in both assessment for and as learning are to be both meaningful and informative for the parties involved, they need to be based on standards that are shared between teachers as well as their pupils. This can take us beyond the common view of moderation as applying an appropriate level to a piece of work to one which is more concerned with identifying the experiences and activities likely to lead to desired learning outcomes and agreeing those qualities of any resulting work which will show that it has met the standard set. Two different pieces of work can be considered to be equally good or at the same level for entirely different reasons.

#### Slide 37

The slide shows the three bullet points used on the assessment of learning side of the AifL triangle. In many respects, especially when thinking about how pupils can be encouraged to take greater responsibility for their own learning, the first two are as important for pupils learning to assess their

own and their peers' progress as they are for teachers.

Evidence of learning is an important source of assessment information that can be used summatively to make judgements about learning and formatively to provide feedback that is focused on improvement. Both are important to pupils learning how to assess themselves and plan their learning. Relevant evidence to use can be quite varied. We may tend to think about evidence as being something on a piece of paper or a test result. Recent research suggests that we need to adopt a wider view of possible sources of evidence and, certainly in terms of summative assessment, we should never depend on a single test result.

The second bullet point is discussed more fully in the next slide.

#### Slide 38

These are the questions the AifL toolkit invites teachers to ask about how they share standards in a school context. Similar questions can also be asked about the extent to which pupils have a clear understanding of what good work looks like as well as opportunities to develop what has been called 'a nose for quality'. As they become more responsible for their own learning, pupils need to be able to think about the evidence that their efforts have generated. Their reflection will help them come to a better understanding of what has been done well and where the effort to improve should be focused next. The quality of peer and self-assessment practised in the classroom could be improved by exploring these three aspects of how standards can be shared with and by pupils in the classroom.

#### Slide 39

##### Activity 4

This final activity is really about trying to identify a practical set of next steps in developing self-assessment by pupils as the first stage in introducing them to a meaningful and manageable approach to personal learning planning. It can be carried out in small group discussion but should be directed towards identifying some clear 'to dos' in and around the following:

- what peer and self-assessment strategies will you try out in your own teaching? (Try to select just one or two examples and persevere with them over a period of time.)
- how will you co-ordinate what you've been doing with other colleagues?
- how can this help you to prepare your pupils to engage with personal learning planning (self-evaluation)?

#### Slide 40

The Association for Achievement and Improvement through Assessment (AAIA) is a very useful source of help in developing assessment for learning and managing whole school initiatives to promote it.

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