

Section C: Extending Formative Assessment

Unit 2: Purposes, principles and practice in building capacities

Presentation notes

Slide 1

This seminar presentation has been devised to provide teachers with an opportunity to think about the connections to be made between Assessment for Learning and A Curriculum for Excellence. Its aim is to explore the implications of setting purposes for the curriculum such as successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors, rather than adopting a more direct approach principally concerned with developing a body of knowledge, understanding and skills associated with various distinct subject areas.

Slide 2

In thinking about these connections, it is useful to begin by remembering the underlying purpose of each of the programmes involved. Determined to Succeed, a national programme with a specific focus on encouraging creative approaches and enterprising attitudes is worth keeping in mind as another element of the national picture with a contribution to make.

Slide 3

This slide was used in the first and second sessions of the Highland Council Learning and Teaching CPD Reflection Framework. It appears again here as a reminder that much of what will be raised in this presentation can offer quite fundamental challenges to the way many people work in the classroom. Control in the classroom is often seen as a desirable end in itself, and that good teaching is only possible once control has been established. This quotation offers an alternative view: if the desire to learn is to become a motivating force in the classroom, current practice may need to be examined closely and critically.

Slide 4

Many teachers can readily identify the three sides of the AifL triangle: assessment for, as and of learning. The apices are sometimes harder to bring to mind. They are Curriculum, Learning & Teaching and Assessment as displayed above. It can be useful at the outset to remember that, in trying to link them through three different aspects of assessment, the AifL programme is a good starting point in trying to make explicit and practical connections between the approach to learning and teaching advocated by AifL and the objectives sought by ACfE.

The slide also identifies the structure of the presentation:

- Session 1: The purposes of the curriculum
- Session 2: The principles of learning and teaching
- Session 3: The practice of assessment

Session 1

The purposes of the curriculum

Slide 5

The first section is essentially a review of what's been published so far about the purposes of the curriculum and an opportunity to think more carefully about what might be involved in seeking to produce successful learners, confident individuals etc. as educational outcomes.

Slide 6

This slide helps to encapsulate the aims of ACfE. It may provide a good opportunity for a discussion about the different aspects of ACfE. The first two points are about curriculum content, what is to be taught/learned; the second two deal with

process, how it may be done. These will be dealt with more fully later.

Slide 7

This statement of purpose lies at the heart of ACfE and is intended to be a memorable and compelling reference point for teachers, parents and children.

The child is at the centre, and our aspiration for each child is represented through the four capacities described above.

In each case the capacity is expanded into ‘attributes’ and ‘capabilities’: it is our task to design a curriculum which will enable each child to develop these attributes and capabilities.

You see here the beginning of a winnowing tool for the review of the curriculum – any activity which is not clearly directed to achieving these aims does not earn its keep and should be removed.

Slide 8

Activity 1

This activity provides an opportunity for participants to gather some thoughts and reactions to the purposes of A Curriculum for Excellence and the capacities it is intended to foster. Using a fairly standard format for gathering perceptions of the importance attached to an area and the extent to which the same area features in practice, that activity is designed both to gather opinions and to encourage reflection and group discussion in and around the issues raised by identifying the purposes and capacities set out in ACfE.

Slide 9

This and the next four slides take each of the purposes one by one and recall some of the questions used in the early ACfE starter kits to encourage reflection on the extent to which broad curriculum outcomes are already being achieved. In most cases, it’s easy enough to see that success is likely to depend not only on the extent to which a

specific outcome is relevant for its purpose but also on the nature and quality of the learning experience designed to achieve it.

When reflecting on this and the following three slides, it may therefore be useful to direct discussion around both aspects, ie content (some understanding of a desired outcome) and process (how to achieve it).

Slides 10 -12

See notes on slide 9.

Slide 13

Having spent some time thinking about the practical effects on classroom methodology of specifying a wider purpose to curriculum objectives, we should reflect on the implications of this more generally. We tend to think of subject competence as consisting of three basic elements: knowledge, understanding and skills. A subject based curriculum tends to emphasise the first of these. As soon as wider purposes are identified, the second and third assume much more importance both within and beyond subject boundaries. If we accept that this is the case, such a shift in emphasis from knowledge to understanding and skills implies a pedagogical shift from the transmission of information to much more interaction between teacher and learner.

Session 2

The principles of learning and teaching

Slide 14

This section takes the idea of interaction and explores it more fully as an important feature of learning and teaching.

Slide 15

This quotation from the policy document, *Ambitious, Excellent Schools* serves to indicate the importance the Scottish Executive attaches to teachers’ professional autonomy. It represents a significant shift from the position adopted during the 1980s and 90s.

Slide 16

On the other hand, this is the kind of thing heard often. The contrast between the two illustrates a gulf that may need to be bridged for progress to be possible.

Slide 17

These are the principles on which the Highland Council Reflection Framework are based. They are explored more fully in section A1 of the framework.

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 particularly noticeable. Pupils' greater engagement in their own learning will constitute an important outcome, and thinking by everyone in all aspects of classroom activity will be a common feature.

This emphasises the importance of thinking in any activity aimed at making progress in learning.

Slide 18

The principles of curriculum design set out in A Curriculum for Excellence have not yet stimulated a similar kind of debate as has been provoked by the publication of the values, purposes and capacities. Yet, they may prove to be much more important in their impact on professional practice. The range in the list above is wider than one might expect in a subject-based curriculum. Principles like breadth, progression, relevance etc are not likely to attract much controversy but others like challenge and enjoyment and personalisation and choice could well.

In discussing these principles, some time could be spent exploring the extent to which the newer additions have been included because of a growing recognition that, if the curriculum is to achieve its wider purposes, pupils need to be active participants in their

own learning. While professional considerations are met in content-related principles like progression, breadth and depth, these encouraging greater interaction for pupils as an element of curriculum design are more concerned with current understandings of what's involved in successful learning.

Slide 19

Activity 2

Using the 'well managed' classroom and the 'transformation seeking' classroom in 'In Search of Understanding' by Brooks and Brooks which appeared at the beginning of this presentation, this activity is designed to stimulate some closer discussion of what should underpin future planning for learning and teaching. The idea of good classroom management is often held to be a necessary precondition of good teaching. On the other hand, if the desire to learn is to become a motivating force in the classroom, we may need to think about the extent to which good management in the classroom may have an unintended but negative impact on pupils' capacity and disposition to learn in ways most suited to their needs.

The activity invites participants to think about the seven principles of curriculum design as contributions to a) the well managed classroom (where good teaching can be the ultimate objective) or b) the transformation seeking classroom (where the focus on learning may make outcomes less predictable).

Slide 20

This slide considers the implications of a curriculum where purposes wider than delivering subject content are involved. If the curriculum is to help create successful learners, confident individuals etc, then classroom experiences cannot be about adding to subject competence alone but should also serve these wider purposes. If the emphasis is currently on knowledge over understanding and skills, then the pendulum will have to shift significantly in the other

direction. Understanding and skills are much more likely to be developed successfully through activities where pupils have opportunities to participate in their learning. In other words, as the development of understanding and skills grows in importance as a learning outcome, how pupils learn becomes just as important as what they learn and, as a result, the nature and quality of the teaching assumes a crucial role in the process.

Slide 21

This and the following slide presents the two sides of the professional ‘contract’ offered by ACfE. If the role of professional judgement is enhanced then there is an expectation that certain responsibilities will be acknowledged.

Slide 22

In considering these responsibilities, it is important to remember that the reflection on and exploration of practice involved needs to be carried out with some candour. There is a rich and growing literature about the defences teachers (and other professionals) can raise to avoid or accommodate proposed changes. The distinction between espoused theories (the world view and values people believe their behaviour is based on) and theories-in-practice (the world view and values implied by people’s behaviour) explored by Argyris and Schon adds further layers to the differences between what we say we do and what we actually do.

Slide 23

Improved assessment practice involving both teachers and pupils offers a rich and meaningful way of filling in the detail of what will be required if the purposes of ACfE are to be realised. If understanding of learning objectives is shared, if learning is explored through dialogue and discussion, if feedback is focused on improvement, if pupils become more involved in assessing themselves then the resulting framework may provide the scaffolding needed to produce successful learners, confident

individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors.

Session 3

The practice of assessment

Slide 24

This final section emphasises the role of assessment in supporting the high quality of learning needed to sustain the development of the capacities identified in A Curriculum for Excellence.

Slide 25

Because assessment is often seen as an activity that follows a piece of learning, there can be a tendency to see it as something separate, to underestimate its impact on both the curriculum and the teaching and learning process itself. A starting point in using assessment to support learning rather than measure it is to remember that, whatever form of assessment we are thinking about, its impact is pervasive. The statement on the slide refers to both the curriculum (what is taught) and pedagogy (how we teach it). Depending on how it is used, assessment can be either positive, binding everything together into a coherent whole, or negative, creating an imbalance between curriculum purpose and teaching or learning outcomes. The AifL programme has sought to achieve a better balance between the three forms of assessment, FOR, AS and OF in order to reduce tensions between the curriculum and its delivery.

Slide 26

This and the next set of slides recap a number of the areas considered in earlier parts of the Highland Council Learning and Teaching CPD Reflection Framework. The focus is on the role of AifL in providing a coherent and balanced approach to assessment likely to encourage the development of the capacities associated with A Curriculum for Excellence.

This slide takes us again to the three elements of assessment for learning normally associated with the evolution of good teaching. These elements are likely to provide the basis on which teachers might seek to develop the understanding and skills needed to focus on learning in the classroom by developing a better balance between teaching and assessment practice.

Slide 27

These bullet points identify what the AifL Toolkit presents as the defining characteristics of assessment FOR learning in an AifL school. The toolkit is a useful resource in helping staff to assess where they are on the journey towards achieving the balance between teaching, learning and assessment in the classroom. The emphasis across the bullet points on shared understanding of learning objectives and feedback focused on improvement highlight the practical nature of the interaction between pupils, parents and staff.

Slide 28

Following the model adopted in the Highland Council framework, the purpose of improving teaching approaches is to develop self-assessment by pupils. The three elements described in the slide follow the general approach set out in the evolution of good teaching described earlier. The first emphasises the importance of being clear or explicit about learning objectives; the second depends on the ability to gather evidence of learning as it proceeds; the third acknowledges the role of feedback in informing improvement.

This repeats an earlier message that the skills pupils need to assess themselves closely resemble those developed by teachers through their own engagement with assessment for learning. The transfer of these skills is frequently facilitated through opportunities for pupils to practise peer-assessment.

Slide 29

The step from self-assessment by pupils to personal learning planning is a short one. To reflect on this, a few moments could be spent considering the similarities between the four elements described above and the three elements of self-assessment on the previous slide. The main differences between self-assessment by pupils and personal learning planning are likely to be of range and timescale: self-assessment will involve scrutiny of a specific outcome while personal planning is a larger process, involving a number of steps carried out over a period of time.

Slide 30

This slide returns to the AifL Toolkit. Once again, the toolkit provides an opportunity and a framework with which to evaluate progress in developing pupil self-assessment.

Slide 31

Within the AifL programme, assessment OF learning is based, not on testing, but on moderated professional judgements about pupils' learning. Research tells us that moderated judgement is more effective in providing a valid (the assessment tests what it claims to test) and reliable (the result can be accepted with confidence from assessment to assessment) assessment of learning than a test is capable of providing. Moderation also provides a context in which curriculum, teaching and learning meet in a way that can contribute to a teacher's own development. The moderation process involves making judgements about learning outcomes (evidence of learning) in the light of learning objectives (learning intentions and success criteria). At one end, the curriculum provides the standard expected and, at the other, a learning outcome can be evaluated against the standard. Sharing the standard set and interpreting the evidence gathered provides an opportunity for teachers to develop the depth of understanding which can both provide an effective way of judging the quality of

pupils' learning and sustain the evolution of good teaching.

Slide 32

This slide is again taken from the AifL Toolkit. Through the three bullet points, progress in developing local moderation as an effective form of assessment OF learning can be evaluated.

The first statement emphasises the importance of using evidence of different kinds to check pupils' progress. Evidence doesn't have to be tangible, such as a piece of paper; an observation can be just as effective, although it probably needs to be recorded somewhere.

In working together to share standards, teachers need two things: first, a clear understanding of the objective and the criteria on which success (or failure) can be judged; second, evidence of what a pupil has done in trying to meet the objective. The moderation process would then involve a discussion around the extent to which the evidence meets the criteria for success set. The conclusion to this should be agreement which those involved can use when making similar judgements in the future.

This model of moderation can provide many benefits: it is a CPD opportunity clearly grounded in classroom practice; it serves to reinforce practical links between curriculum, teaching and learning; it serves to focus reflection on the quality of provision in the school.

Finally, it is worth thinking about the extent to which pupils are involved in this kind of moderation of their own work: if they, too, have a clear understanding of objectives and success criteria which they can apply to the evidence produced by their own efforts, they will be able to make sound judgements of their own progress.

Slide 33

This slide brings together different aspects of the Highland Council framework to provide a tentative model of the interactions between them. The model begins with Planning and Delivery, two areas of primary interest to teachers when bringing a curriculum to life. The curriculum guidelines inform a planning process leading to a teaching programme which is the delivered over a period of time. Delivery culminates in an evaluation of some kind which informs future planning. In a subject-based curriculum, the emphasis may well be on what is to be taught, and outcomes can often be seen in one dimension, also subject-based. Adding some wider purpose to a curriculum tends to add not just one other dimension but two. First and obviously, the purpose of including some outcome is added, the question *why* is raised. In ACfE, this will be about the contribution made by a specific objective towards building a capacity. This often also points to the importance of thinking about *how* the outcome is to be achieved in order to meet the purpose set. In this respect, the principles of curriculum design come into play, particularly principles like *depth, challenge and enjoyment* and *personalisation and choice*. So a curriculum framework like ACfE raises three very explicit planning questions:
 What is the learning objective?
 Why is it worth achieving? (Purpose)
 How can it be achieved? (Principles)

As a result, delivering the curriculum becomes more complex. The model on the slide takes the three elements in the evolution of good teaching as a delivery model. 'Being explicit about learning' helps to bring together the answers to the what, why and how planning questions. The other two complete the delivery cycle and when assessment by pupils is added as a development of the cycle, a link can be made to the purposes of the curriculum.

Slide34

Activity 3

This final activity offers a starting point for a planning approach that can accommodate the requirements of a multi dimensional curriculum like ACfE. The first sheet is essentially an aide memoire using the model set out on the previous slide as a way of organising the different strands that need to be brought together when planning teaching and learning. The second sheet provides space for notes about the three main questions to be answered in the course of the planning.

An initial activity using these sheets would be to revisit an existing unit or lesson plan and look for answers to the three planning questions in order to develop a clearer understanding of the changes that may be required to better match the requirements set out by the purposes and principles of ACfE.

Slide 35

This presentation uses AifL as an approach to learning and its assessment that could play a large part in supporting the purposes underpinning ACfE. To emphasise this, it concludes with two slides designed to set out the distinctive features of how the AifL programme has set about its work. The first describes some of the ways in which it has tried to provide a framework within which school communities can collaborate to develop understanding and expertise.

Slide 36

The second identifies some of the themes pursued by the programme which have helped shaped an approach worth sustaining through local activities.

The source for this slide is ‘Assessment is for Learning: exploring programme success’ by Hayward, Spencer and Simpson. A copy of the full paper has been included in this unit and section 6 of the paper provided a short synopsis of the findings.

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