

Assessment for Learning in the MFL Department

Within the MFL Department, we believe that all assessment should be meaningful and purposeful. It should inform the teacher's future planning, to ensure students make appropriate progress. As the name suggests, it is assessment to enable students to learn, as opposed to testing to see how well (badly) they have fared.

We also believe that students should be taught to begin assessing their own work in order to develop an analytical, independent approach to their learning.

Assessment for Learning (AFL) attempts to address these beliefs, outlined under four main strands or headings:-

- Self-assessment
- Sharing the criteria
- Questioning
- Comment-only marking*

*This latter point challenges the way in which traditional marking is approached. Parents may find that their children's books appear not to have been marked, in the manner to which they are accustomed.

For further information regarding these points, please refer to the PowerPoint presentation notes.

What AFL activities can I use in the classroom?

I have listed below a number of teaching strategies that enable Assessment for Learning. The list is neither prescriptive nor exhaustive and is intended to assist teachers in their planning.

- ❖ Lesson objectives should be specific. They should be what you expect the students to be able to do by the end of the activity/lesson (as opposed to simply describing the activities they are going to do). Objectives should be

shared with the learners at an appropriate moment in the lesson (often, but not always, at the beginning).

- ❖ Traffic lights – Students should be taught to judge their own understanding of the lesson objectives using a 3-point scale:-
 - “I don’t understand”
 - “I understand, but need further explanation”
 - “I understand and I’m ready to move on”

The exact definitions might vary according to the specific criteria and objectives. For example, after introducing a set of vocabulary, the definitions might be as follows;

- “I don’t recognise the meanings”
- “I understand these words”
- “I can also spell the words”

It is essential that, when asking the students to assess themselves, the exact criteria are explained to them first.

- ❖ Mini-test / silent test

Lower achieving students lose motivation when consistently scoring badly in tests. The “silent test”, however, allows students a second chance to succeed, before marks are taken in. A test is conducted in the normal manner and the answers are read/shown to the class. The students mark their own test, marking green dots where they were correct, amber if they were almost correct and red if their answer was wrong. It is important that the marks are not shared, giving the student the privacy which does not threaten self-esteem. However, what is important is that the individual student is aware of what s/he must do in order to improve for the real test to come, when the marks will be given to the teacher. A homework activity could then be for the student to focus on the answers for which they scored red/amber, and concentrate their time and effort on learning these. In this way, time is not wasted revising structures with which they are already confident, although in practice, this is often what happens.

❖ “Bilan” – End of Module assessments

As with the silent test, students should be encouraged to analyse their progress and identify the points that need attention **before** doing the end of unit test. If they are given a Bilan sheet (I can do...), listing the main objectives of the unit, this will help them to assess their own confidence at the individual, important aspects of the topic. Taking each point in turn, students should mark the Bilan with the colour-coded traffic lights, highlighting immediately which objectives require further revision or help. A class activity could then be for the pupils to research the points for which they marked a red dot; finding the page in their text/exercise book; asking a friend who was more confident; checking with the teacher.

❖ Carousel of Experts

Having identified their individual strengths and weaknesses, students can then help each other. Volunteers who feel confident with chosen objectives are elected to assume the role of expert, explaining the points to groups who are less confident. After 5-10 minutes, the groups can be rotated, so that pupils get to work on several points in the lesson.

❖ Questioning

The lesson objectives might be set in the form of a question that invites the students to think about the aims as the lesson progresses. The teacher should then be able to elicit appropriate answer(s) at the end of the activity/lesson.

Furthermore, the way a teacher phrases a question is important, in order to maximise the thinking processes involved and also to establish whether or not pupils have genuinely understood.

❖ Lesson experts – plenary

One/two pupils are chosen to sit out and not take part in the required lesson activities. Instead they take notes and must give a presentation to the class at the end of the lesson, explaining the salient points. The expert is changed each lesson. A variation of this is “hot-seating” where the class can ask any question they like of the experts, who must try to explain the lesson aims.

❖ Modelling

Modelling is the process of producing a piece of work with the whole class, or groups of students, through questioning and scribing their answers. The teacher models the thought processes involved by “thinking aloud” to demonstrate how to reach the desired outcome.

❖ Peer assessment

Work, produced by the pupils, is swapped and assessed by the others in the class. Students who are weak in one skill area (e.g. spelling) could be paired up with those who are more confident.