

NATIONAL STANDARDS FACTSHEET

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Assessment for learning

Assessment for learning describes assessment that focuses on improving students' learning and teachers' teaching. Teachers can use information from assessments to:

- plan and modify learning programmes for individual students, groups of students and the class as a whole
- pinpoint and then build on the strengths of each student
- identify and then address the learning needs of each student in a clear and constructive way
- involve and engage parents, families and whānau in their child's learning.

Through the assessment for learning process teachers can help students become more aware of not only what they are learning, but how they are learning it. This enables students to take control of their learning and develop self-regulation skills.

Independent learners like this have the ability to seek out and gain new skills, new knowledge and new understanding, according to their own needs and learning goals.

Assessment for learning takes place in a positive learning environment. Teachers should encourage students to listen to one another, respond constructively, and appreciate the different strengths, experiences and skills among the class. Students will then understand that wrong answers can assist learning just as effectively as right answers.

Principles of assessment for learning

Assessment for learning must be underpinned by the understanding that every student can improve

Assessment for learning should enable both the teacher and the student to play a part in changing what happens in the classroom. It should be driven by ako ('to teach and to learn')

Knowledge of students is vital to ensuring that each assessment is appropriate and fit for purpose

Good assessment should focus on making the process of student thinking visible to the teacher and the student

Assessment for learning should help students 'learn how to learn'

Using assessment

A range of assessment approaches should be used to ensure teachers have good information, including:

- conversations about learning between teachers and students
- taking simple mental notes during observation
- students assessing themselves and each other
- detailed analysis of student work
- using a range of formal assessment tools.

Assessment information can be used throughout the education system to provide information for:

- parents, families and whānau on their child's progress and next learning steps
- school leaders to support school-wide planning and continuing teacher development
- communities and schools to assist governance and resourcing decisions
- the Education Review Office when providing advice on school improvement
- the Ministry of Education when reviewing policies, implementation and targeting funding.

Building students' assessment capability

When students know what their assessment results mean, they are better able to identify their own strengths, needs, and recognise 'Where to next?' Students who use assessment opportunities to determine where they are at, can take more control of their own learning and become more effective and independent learners.

Evidence suggests that when students are able to monitor their own work, they are more likely to make progress. To do this well, they need to understand:

- what high quality work looks like (helped by examining examples and models of quality work)
- what criteria define quality work (helped by participation in developing learning goals and assessment criteria)
- how to compare and evaluate their own work against criteria (helped by peer and self-assessment).

When students understand assessment, they are able to provide better information to teachers. Better student feedback gives teachers a clearer picture of students' learning needs and enables the next learning steps to be personalised.

Engaging and motivating

Giving students greater ownership of their learning allows them to become more independent and successful, and helps them control their own learning outcomes.

Students who are involved in assessment, understand how it works, what information will be gathered, and how it will be used are more likely to be motivated to learn. Having a good understanding of assessment for learning will help them not only want to make the effort, but be more independent learners, and be willing to keep on engaging, even when they find the learning difficult.

Content knowledge

Teachers structure teaching, learning and assessment to deliver content and respond to how students think and learn. This requires teachers to have a clear understanding of the concepts, a sense of the likely understandings and misunderstandings students will bring to their learning and also how to best facilitate new learning for all students.

Teachers need to understand the curriculum, its goals, and how students can progress towards them. Teachers have to act on what they see to improve their students' learning. Effective assessment for learning needs to balance both curriculum and pedagogical content knowledge. Teachers need to know what to teach and how to teach and assess it.

Planning and communication

Assessment for learning should be built into everyday classroom practice.

- Learning goals, teaching strategies and assessment criteria should be carefully matched - students should know in advance what they will learn, as well as how and why they are to be assessed
- Planning should be flexible so teachers can make changes in response to new information, opportunities or insights - strategies should check whether students understand the goals and the criteria for assessing work
- Students should be helped to understand how they will receive feedback, how their learning will be assessed and how they will be supported to make further progress.

A teacher's planning should provide opportunities for both student and teacher to obtain information about progress towards learning goals, and use it to direct the learning process.

Progressive and cumulative

Assessment should be valid, fair and suited to the purpose. It should measure progress, not just achievement. Any assessment can only provide a snapshot of achievement on a particular day.

Performance will vary from day-to-day depending on the:

- nature of the assessment task
- conditions under which the assessment is conducted

- purpose of the assessment
- student's preparation
- student's engagement and motivation.

To make a valid and fair measure of progress over time, teachers need to analyse information from a range of sources. It is important that teachers gather information both formally and informally, using a range of approaches to add to or modify their understanding of each student's learning over time.

Supports teaching and learning goals

Teachers need to know how every assessment they use can assist learning, and how to check if it has.

Feedback, based on assessment is one of the most powerful ingredients in teaching and learning. Maximising the quality, appropriateness and use of feedback should be a core aim of all assessment practice. Knowledge of the student is essential for knowing how to deliver feedback in a positive and constructive way. Feedback is key to the process of continuous improvement - for both the teacher and student.

Feedback guides the student through the next learning steps, and helps teachers modify their teaching. Effective feedback provides clear, descriptive, criterion-based information that enables the student to determine where they are in a learning progression, how their level of understanding differs from what they set as their learning goals, and what they need to do to move further towards those goals.

Next teaching and learning steps

To be effective in describing next teaching and learning steps, assessment for learning should be linked to some form of learning progression.

A learning progression should clearly identify what steps show progress towards a learning goal. Assessment for learning helps the teacher and student identify where they are along the learning progression. Progression does not necessarily always happen in a linear fashion. Students will often move far ahead in one area while retaining significant learning needs in another. Part of the art of teaching is supporting students to build on their strengths and provide challenging yet achievable steps towards learning goals.

Cultural aspects

Teachers and students have their own cultural values, assumptions and understandings about learning and assessment.

Effective assessment practice needs to recognise these differences and similarities and the impact they have on how students may respond to assessment approaches. Effective assessment practice should plan for collaborative and collective assessment, in both formal and informal authentic contexts, in order to reflect the educational values of different cultures, backgrounds and experiences.

Teaching inquiry

Assessment for learning is an area that will require continual review and professional discussion. There are always ways that teaching can be improved to respond to different student learning needs.

Teachers need professional knowledge to plan for assessment, observe learning, analyse and interpret evidence of learning, give feedback to students and support students in their self and peer assessment. Teachers can be supported to develop these skills through initial and ongoing quality professional learning.

Schools should establish and encourage a culture of professional inquiry where teachers seek out and improve their skills in using assessment for learning. Professional discussion amongst colleagues is an effective way to do this. In this kind of forum, teachers can share the parts of their practice that:

- they have found easiest to change
- have been the most challenging to change
- have made a difference for their students
- support them to achieve their own goals for classroom practice.