



An Chomhairle Náisiúnta Curaclaim agus Measúnachta
National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

FOCUS ON LEARNING

FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

Contents

Introduction	4
Why change?	5
Working with your colleagues	6
Getting started	7
Some ideas for using the posters & idea cards	10
What are the big messages?	11
Some bear traps & how to avoid them	12
Survey tools	13
Background reading	15
Facilitator's evaluation of workshop materials	16

Introduction

This guide aims to support you in planning a whole-school approach to developing effective, ongoing assessment practice which supports your students' learning.

We now have strong evidence that when assessment is done differently, teachers and students can see more clearly what students are learning, how they are learning and how to improve.

As each school is working within a different context and has a different starting point, these resources are not intended to be used in a prescriptive 'one size fits all' manner. We would encourage you to use these resources in a flexible manner. It's also a good idea to work with a colleague in planning and facilitating the workshops. There is successful practice in schools already, with teachers using a range of approaches to facilitate ongoing assessment in their classrooms. We hope these materials will help support continued reflection and sharing of learning about assessment practices that support student learning.



"For assessment systems to enhance learning, and not just measure it, students need to be at the centre of the assessment framework. To become lifelong learners, they need to be able to assess their own progress, make adjustments to their understanding and take control of their own learning. Assessment can only lead to improvement in learning outcomes if students themselves take action and use assessment information to close gaps in their own learning."

*Synergies for Better Learning, OECD, 2013
p. 220*

Why change?

In his book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen Covey suggests that a habit is formed when a person knows what to do, how to do it and has a good reason for doing it – in other words knows why. Understanding why helps create motivation and conviction.

Much of the material in this Toolkit focuses on “the how”. This practical approach is important for busy teachers who are eager for new ideas. The risk, though, is that the ideas can be approached as a set of tips and tricks which teachers try out for a while but easily dismiss if their changed practice is not built on changed understanding.

In a nutshell – the main reason why change is needed is because we know that assessment can support students in becoming better learners.

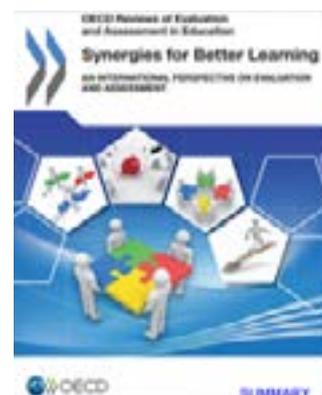
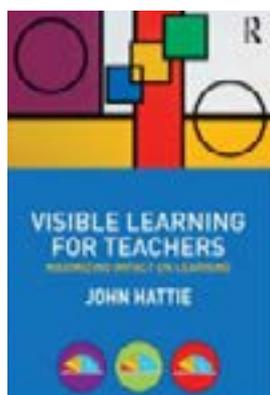
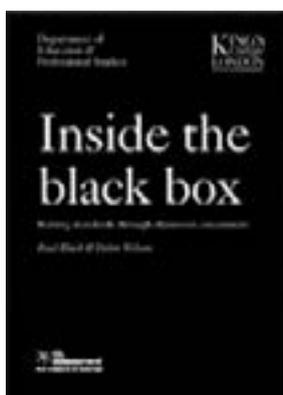
It is important that you and your colleagues have an opportunity to discuss why change is needed. Let's look at some of the reasons that you might consider when seeking a rationale for doing things differently.

- **Evidence from practice** – We know it is working for some teachers. Hearing how other teachers have used these ideas in their classroom and how it has helped improve their students' motivation and learning can encourage others to try out new ideas. Keep in mind that within your own staff some people

will already have incorporated assessment for learning approaches within their teaching and can be encouraged to share their experience with colleagues.

- **Value-based reasons** – For example, ‘We're doing this because we believe in a holistic education, in justice and in inclusion. So we need to expand our assessment methods to allow all students to be assessed in ways that reflect those values.’
- **Theoretical reasons** – For example, pointing to research can provide evidence that changes are needed. Many teachers have found the research by Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam, contained in a series of booklets that includes *Inside the Black Box* and *Working Inside the Black Box*, provides a good summary of the main actions teachers can take to improve their classroom assessment practices and the benefits of these practices. John Hattie's work is also very important as it provides an analysis of a substantial research base and shows the powerful impact of high quality feedback on raising standards. More recently, *Synergies for Better Learning*, published by the OECD, sets out the key factors needed to improve assessment practice based on an analysis of 28 countries
- **Pragmatic reasons** – For example, ‘It's part of education policy and Inspectors are expecting it' or ‘Many students are disengaged and we need to find better ways to engage them in learning and assessment of their learning’.

Key References



Facilitating professional learning with your colleagues

Educational research has shown that teacher CPD is more effective when

- teachers learn from each other through dialogue and sharing
- there is a collegial approach to both designing and directing the learning
- teachers are affirmed in practices which they are already doing well
- there are opportunities for reflection and further learning over time.

The facilitator

- has planned and researched the topic (in consultation with others)
- fosters an atmosphere of mutual respect between equals
- draws out participation from everyone
- agrees learning goals and checks to see goals are met
- uses questioning to build on what is being said and draws out different perspectives and experiences
- organises the work of the group and monitors progress as it moves along
- can withhold judgement

Remember a facilitator is not

- an expert who knows everything about the topic
- expected to provide quick or easy answers
- someone who presents PowerPoint slides or reads from a prepared script or handouts

Using questions

How a question is posed can sometimes unintentionally put people off. Thinking about how you word questions can be important in opening up responses.

Some useful questions to use are:

- Tell us more about that?
- How would that work in...?
- What would be the advantages of this approach?
- What might help in getting past that obstacle?
- What has worked well for you before?
- How would you do it differently another time?
- What would be the benefit of doing it differently?
- How could we do that even better?

Listening Skills

A good facilitator is a good listener. Here are six ways to improve your listening skills.

1. Express genuine interest. By showing that you understand what an individual is saying, you confirm that you have listened attentively and know what was said. For example, nod your head to show you understand or say 'I understand.'
2. Express empathy. For example say, 'I know finding time can be a challenge....' Or 'I understand your fear about how students might respond to change.'
3. Restate the problem or point. Say, 'This is what I hear you saying. Am I correct? Or 'So what you are saying is that you are not clear why we are making these changes.'
4. Know when to remain silent. If an individual is upset or needs to get something off his/her mind it might sometimes be best to remain silent and let them off-load, within reason. Then when they have stopped talking you can simply say 'Thank you. You clearly feel very strongly about this' or 'Thank you. Now, would anyone else like to offer another perspective?'
5. Show respect. Even if you disagree with a person's position, fully attend to what is being said. Don't ever engage in argument or confrontation.
6. Stay focused. By making eye contact and reading body language, you will show interest and be able to more fully understand what is being communicated.

(Credit: Adapted from SSE training resources)

Getting started

These pages offer guidance on how you might prepare for and organise the workshops with staff and suggest some pre-workshop and post-workshop activities that might be helpful. You may find it helpful to follow the suggestions set out below or develop your own workshop plans.

Before you get started:

1. Find out

What information or data do you already have in relation to assessment practices in the school? Is there any data gathered through SSE that might be relevant? What can students tell you about their experience of assessment? How can this inform your planning? If you are unsure what's currently happening then you might use some of the survey tools in this guide (see pages 12 and 13) or create your own consultation tools.

Are there any staff already using some of the approaches that are discussed in these resources? How can you involve them in sharing their experiences as part of the workshop?

2. Review

Review the material in the Toolkit and decide what is the most suitable starting point to begin working with your staff.

3. Keep in mind your aims

Keep in mind the overall aim is to facilitate your colleagues in reflecting on current assessment practice and to discuss ideas about ways of developing their practice further. You may also have other aims specific to your school. For example, 'to achieve a common language and understanding of assessment' or 'to examine how we can give better feedback'.

An introductory staff session

Before embarking on working through the topics in this Toolkit it is important for staff to have an understanding of the rationale for changing assessment practice and an opportunity to share their current experiences around assessment. Some survey data gathered from teachers and students could be reviewed at this meeting and this could help identify the priority areas of change that are needed. This introductory meeting can then form the basis for planning subsequent sessions.



“Adult learning theories conclude that effective learning is an active rather than a passive process and that professional learning cannot occur if teachers are passive recipients instead of active participants. Central to Cosán, therefore, is a vision of teachers as professionals who take ownership of their professional development and steer the course of their own learning journeys.”

Cosán, Draft National Framework for Teachers' Learning, Teaching Council, May 2015



Using the resources

The workshops are designed around four topics:

1. Learning intentions and success criteria
2. Effective questioning
3. Formative Feedback
4. Students reflecting on their learning

Each topic is supported by:

- **A slide presentation** which briefly introduces the topic and key terminology. There is a set of notes to accompany each set of slides.
- **A short video** to stimulate discussion.
- **A booklet** which offers a range of workshop ideas, self-evaluation checklists, discussion cards and a forward planner.

The material for each topic is designed to support approximately three hours of staff engagement in an interactive workshop. However you can break up the materials and use them for shorter sessions. Each school will use and adapt the material in a way to suit their own context.

Where possible, we would encourage using the material on a school-wide basis, as research evidence suggests that changes in assessment practice are more likely to become embedded if they are introduced on a systematic basis across the whole school.

You may find it helpful to follow the steps set out below or you can develop your own workshop plan. Although content is important, the best staff development sessions succeed because of the quality of the interaction between those involved.

Step 1

Use the slide presentation to briefly introduce key ideas about the topic. You can use or adapt the facilitator's notes that accompany this. The suggested time is 6-7 minutes.

Step 2

Show the short video which is aimed at stimulating some initial discussion on the topic.

Keep an eye on time and don't let the discussion run on too long.

Step 3

Having provided an introduction, you are now ready to explore the workshop materials in the booklet. Don't feel under pressure to use all the activities. Choose those that meet your aims and needs and remember that it is better to allow lots of time for discussion and application of the ideas than to rush through everything. The worksheets and discussion cards are particularly useful in generating discussion and learning.

Step 4

Review what has been learned and what are the big messages and action points for moving forward. Display the posters as a reminder of some of the key messages. Encourage staff to engage with some of the materials in the recommended reading section of each booklet.

Post workshop follow-up

Discuss with the senior management team how staff can be encouraged to engage in ongoing discussion and collaborative planning around these ideas. Some options to consider might be setting up professional learning communities, buddy meetings, instructional rounds, or peer observation.

Psychologists tell us that changing or forming a habit follows a 3 step pattern – Reminder, Routine, Reward. Think about these steps in the context of changing assessment practices in your school. How can you build in reminders? How can you make the changes routine? And what might be the rewards?

The 3 R's of Habit Formation



"We may have to accept that we cannot effect transformation but can only allow it to occur. We cannot generate it, steer it, or control it."

Johannes Krause, 2014

Some ideas for using the posters & idea cards

Posters

The posters are designed to provoke thought and can help to set the agenda for the session. They might be displayed around the room and participants might be asked to do a 'poster parade' either individually or in pairs. Different tasks can be set using the posters, for example:

- a. *Pick a poster*: ask participants, either individually or in pairs to pick a poster they would like to discuss. In picking a poster, they might
 - agree with it and think it is making an important point
 - be worried about it, disagree with it or think it is nonsense
 - be puzzled or intrigued by it and would like to know more.
- b. *3-2-1*: ask participants to discuss a selection of posters and report back on
 - three things they already knew
 - two things that surprised them
 - one thing they want to know more about.

Idea cards

The idea cards can also be used in different ways.

Ask everyone to form small groups and then distribute a set of cards to each small group.

- a. *I already do*: A particularly good activity is to ask participants to pick a card that describes something they already do and then briefly tell the group how they use the idea, what they have learned from it and whether or not they would recommend it to others.
- b. *Daft, Do, Maybe*: first participants should rule out the ideas they think are daft. This might be because they don't see the point in them, they think they are inappropriate for their subject, or because they don't think they could use the idea with the class or year group they're working with. Then ask them to identify the ideas they already use regularly. Finally, get participants to identify the 'maybe' ideas. These are the most interesting because they are the ones they might consider adopting to develop their practice: they may be ideas they had not thought of, ideas that are like, but slightly different from what they already do, or things they did in the past but later gave up.

They can report back on what were the most popular ideas and which ideas created the most discussion.

What are the big messages?

The big messages related to assessment can be found on the posters that accompany these workshops. You might print them off and keep them visible as you plan and facilitate the workshops.

7 Steps to Effective Questioning

1. Create a classroom culture in which students are encouraged to ask questions, and to answer questions of others.
2. Use the 'no hands' rule. Only one student is allowed to ask a question, if you have 'no hands', everyone is invited to ask about the question.
3. Ask 'Just What?' When asking a question, be specific. Ask for a particular piece of information.
4. Ask 'How?' When asking a question, be specific. Ask for a particular piece of information.
5. Ask 'Why?' When asking a question, be specific. Ask for a particular piece of information.
6. Ask 'What?' When asking a question, be specific. Ask for a particular piece of information.
7. Ask 'Where?' When asking a question, be specific. Ask for a particular piece of information.

Just wait 3 seconds

Research shows that waiting 3 seconds after asking a question and waiting answers to just three seconds or more leads to:

- More responses from less able students
- More thoughtful and creative responses
- More follow-on questions from students
- Students challenge and/or improve the answers of other students
- Responses are more confident
- Longer answers from students
- More students with answers
- Fewer 'don't know's
- All have answers. All questions that are asked are answered. The only student who doesn't know is the one who asked the question.

Open questions, open minds

CLOSED questions imply that the teacher has a predetermined correct response in mind.

OPEN questions permit a range of responses and solicit opinion.

WHAT? WHERE? WHEN? WHO? HOW? WHY? COULD? WOULD?

Success Criteria...

- need to be planned in advance
- must link clearly to the learning intention
- need to be owned by the student
- need to be broad enough to include all abilities in a class
- lead to more focussed and successful teaching and learning

Effective feedback

Clarity marks levels and grades lets students know how well they have performed relative to others in their class. It doesn't tell them anything about the teacher's beliefs that performance or help them to improve.

When the classroom focuses on overall 'good' or 'bad' marks in the class, students often look for ways to obtain the best marks, rather than become better learners. Or they simply seek to get by and avoid difficult tasks. Or even worse, they simply give up and 'check out'.

The most powerful single moderator that enhances achievement is feedback. The most simple prescription for improving education must be the design of feedback. This does not mean using many tests and providing more prescriptive directions. It means providing information how and why the student understands and what directions the student must take to improve.

Feedback to any student should be about the particular qualities of his or her work, with advice or advice on what he or she can do to improve, and should avoid comparisons with other students.

Effective formative feedback...

- Relates to learning intentions & success criteria
- Allows time for students to act on it
- Prompts thinking
- Identifies student success
- Makes the learning more visible for both the teacher & student
- Gives advice on how improvement can happen
- Praises the work rather than the student

Effective feedback practice

- Clarifies good practice
- Encourages actionable feedback
- Encourages interaction
- Facilitates self-assessment
- Provides information

Learning Intentions

The benefits

- The quality of work improves
- Behaviour will improve
- Students will become more focussed on tasks and persevere for longer
- There is rich teacher-student dialogue.
- Feedback is easier

Some bear traps & how to avoid them

1. Separating assessment from teaching and learning

Teaching, learning and assessment are all connected. How and what we assess sends a message to students about what kind of learning is valued. Therefore assessment needs to be closely aligned with the kind of learning we want to encourage. Planning for assessment as part of the planning for teaching and learning is more likely to achieve alignment between how we teach and how we assess. Think about ways of bringing planning for assessment into subject and lesson planning in your school.

2. Separating work on assessment from the school self-evaluation (SSE) process.

School self-evaluation requires schools to ask the following key questions with regard to aspects of its work (including assessment):

- How well are we doing?
- How do we know? What evidence do we have?
- How can we find out more?
- What are our strengths?
- What are our areas for improvement?
- How can we improve? ¹

The appendices in this guide, along with the various checklists and reflection tools in the four booklets will complement the work your school is already doing with the six-step self-evaluation process.²

3. Compliance rather than understanding.

This can arise if teachers are simply told what to do and there is lack of time for reflection and discussion. Teachers can adopt a compliance approach, rather than coming to their own personal understanding of the key concepts and how they might apply or adapt them for their classroom.

4. Mechanical adoption of new practices.

Teachers should be encouraged to adopt a reflective perspective in all of this. Slavishly applying a set of techniques is not the aim. While the approaches suggested in this Toolkit are well-grounded in practice and research, teachers need to be flexible to avoid becoming too mechanical. For example, it is sometimes good to hold back on the Learning Intention at the start of class and let the students discover it. Similarly, sometimes it is useful to give students a piece of work to assess without giving them the success criteria and they might have to discuss and agree a set of criteria.

The Six-Step School Self-Evaluation Process



5. Taking on too much too fast.

Encourage teachers to take the ideas and try them out one at a time rather than trying to apply all the ideas in the Toolkit overnight. There is no 'quick fix' with a promise of rapid rewards. Embedding and sustaining new practices takes time.

¹ School Self-Evaluation Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools, p. 12

² Ibid, p. 14, Figure 2.1



Sample questions which can be used or adapted to audit current assessment practice in your school. (Survey Monkey will facilitate this)

Survey on Assessment _____ Subject _____

1. What types of assessment takes place in your classroom?

- | | | |
|--|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Written class test | <input type="checkbox"/> Comprehension exercises | <input type="checkbox"/> Peer-assessment |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Worksheets | <input type="checkbox"/> Homework | <input type="checkbox"/> Self-assessment |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Essays | <input type="checkbox"/> Presentations | <input type="checkbox"/> Performance or demonstration |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Oral questioning (by teacher) | <input type="checkbox"/> Chapter/Topic review test | <input type="checkbox"/> Portfolio |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Project work | <input type="checkbox"/> Quiz | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) |

2. When setting an ongoing assessment task, do the students know the criteria for success?

- Always Sometimes Rarely

3. How do you facilitate students being involved in their own assessments?

4. (a) Does your department agree common assessments at

- Christmas Summer Throughout the year

(b) If yes, how helpful is this in planning for learning? _____

5. Do you use different assessments for different ability groups in your class? Yes No

6. What form of feedback do you give your students?

- Oral feedback Percentage on test Grade only on test Comment only feedback
 Combination of above Other (please specify)

7. Which of the following procedures do you find most useful for reporting on the outcomes of assessment to parents?

- School reports Parent/Teacher meeting Note in journal Phone call home
 Meeting with a parent Other (please specify)

8. List two ways that you currently use assessment to help students improve their learning in your subject(s)?

(i) _____

(ii) _____

9. Have you encountered any issues in relation to assessment that you wish you state here?

10. Have you any suggestions as to how the school can improve assessment practices?



Student Survey

Year _____

Subject _____

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Don't know	Agree	Strongly agree
My knowledge and understanding is checked regularly in class.	<input type="radio"/>				
I get feedback regularly from my teacher on what steps I need to take to improve my learning.	<input type="radio"/>				
I have opportunities to work with other students so that we can help each other.	<input type="radio"/>				
I know how to judge my own work and I can see what I have done well and where I need to improve.	<input type="radio"/>				
I know how to give helpful feedback to other students about their work.	<input type="radio"/>				
I have time to reflect on my progress during the learning and at the end of learning something new.	<input type="radio"/>				
I can show what I have learnt in different ways not just written tests.	<input type="radio"/>				
I am clear on what I am expected to achieve by the time I have completed a task/project.	<input type="radio"/>				

Other ways of opening up dialogue with students about their assessment experience

When you hear the word assessment, what does it bring to mind? Is there a feeling, a word, an image or association?

What do you think is the purpose of assessment?

What is your favourite kind of assessment? Why?

Can you think of an occasion when you found an assessment experience helped you to learn? What made that experience helpful for you?

What kind of testing and/or assessment does the following:

- motivates/encourages you
- shows you what you need to improve
- makes you feel good about yourselves as learners
- improves learning
- discourages you
- stands in the way of your learning...is an obstacle.

Pick an area of your subject and talk to the students about the best ways to assess it.

Background reading

Download a summary of the key ideas and research on this topic.

Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam published a seminal piece of research entitled *Inside the Black Box: Raising Standards Through Classroom Assessment*, (1998).

Changing Assessment Practice: Process, Principles and Standards, (an article) John Gardner, Wynne Harlen Louise Hayward, Gordon Stobart (Assessment Reform Group, 2008)

Cosán, Draft National Framework for Teachers' Learning, Teaching Council, May 2015

Assessment for Learning: Effects and Impact, (an article) María Teresa Flórez and Pamela Sammons, Oxford University, 2013.

Also be sure to look at the list of suggested further reading and websites at the end of each of the four booklets in this series.

Poster

Download the poster *10 principles of Assessment for Learning*

Further Reading about CPD

Peter Van Marion, *The Norwegian SUN project*

Kevin Patton, Melissa Parker, and Misti M Neutzling, *Tennis Shoes Required: The Role of the Facilitator in Professional Development*

Don A. Klinger, L. Volante and C. DeLuca, "Building Teacher Capacity Within the Evolving Assessment Culture in Canadian Education," *Policy Futures in Education, Special Issue: Developing sustainable assessment cultures in school learning organisations* 10, No. 4 (2012): 447-460.

Elena Aguilar, *Teachers Observing Teachers; Instructional Rounds*.

Readings on Reflective Practice

Brookfield, S. (2009) 'The getting of wisdom: what critically reflective teaching is and why it's important', in *Becoming a critically reflective teacher*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. Download copy available at

Pollard, A. (2002) *Readings for Reflective Teaching*: Continuum.

Schön, D.A. (2006) *The reflective practitioner: how professionals think in action*. Oxford: Jossey-Bass.

Zwozdiak-Myers, P. (2012) *The Reflective Teacher's Handbook*: Routledge.



Facilitator's evaluation of workshop materials

What parts of the Toolkit resources were most useful?

What parts did not work so well? Why?

List any additional resources that you found useful which are not available at www.juniorcycle.ie under *ongoing assessment*.

Comment on the overall strengths and weakness of these resources and any changes you might suggest to make them better.

To receive a free set of colour poster to support assessment practise in your school, please fill out and return this evaluation sheet to: NCCA, 35 Fitzwilliam Square, Dublin 2



35 Fitzwilliam Square, Dublin DO2 KH36.
T: +353 1 661 7177 F: +353 1 661 7180 E: info@ncca.ie

www.ncca.ie