

Assessment

Talking about learning...

Tuning into yourself in class – listening to what you are saying – can sometimes be a less than positive experience. As a teacher colleague once memorably noted, it can be a salutary lesson to find out that you are boring yourself!

The routine exchanges of classroom management, the reminders, the pleas, the warnings, the orders, the rebukes, and those inevitable instructions about which copy to use, can take up so much of lesson talk, that talk about learning becomes squeezed out. Teachers using Assessment for Learning approaches in their classrooms get to talk more about learning. And what's more, many are finding that because of the positive impact of their new skills on student motivation, the need for the other kinds of lesson talk is greatly reduced.

Keeping the focus on the learning intention, talking to the students about their progress towards it, getting them to talk about their progress and the progress of others and discussing success and ways to improve learning brings the students inside the learning process. It makes learning something that they do, organise and talk about, rather than something the teacher does for them and to which they can respond or ignore.

The two examples here, from geography and from French, show that using AfL requires no special equipment or avant garde methodologies. Just more talk about learning and its outcomes, and less about the other stuff... and less chance of listening to yourself, and having to stifle that yawn.

An example from a 1st Year Geography class

Syllabus area: Human Habitat – Process and Change. The Earth's

Surface: Shaping the Crust.

Topic: Plates - Earthquakes.

Learning intention: Students will understand the concept of mobile plates and the features that occur as a result of plate interaction. They will also identify the impact of earthquakes upon humans.

Criteria for success

Students will be able to:

- give specific location and time of earthquake
- identify the two plates involved
- describe the overall scene
- use these key words:
 - Plates
 - Richter scale
 - Seismograph
 - Focus / Epicentre
 - Shockwaves
- name three pieces of specific damage as a direct result of this earthquake.

Task: Imagine you are a journalist 'live at the scene' immediately after an earthquake. Write a newspaper/television report.

Conditions under which the students completed the task:

Having completed the topic, the students are given the task as homework. They are also asked to present it to the class.

Comment

Below is an example of student work that is a successful response to the task. In giving feedback to this student,

the teacher has referred to the criteria for success, which have all been met, although the last one could have been developed in more detail.

EARTHQUAKE IN L.A.

An earthquake occurred last night in Los Angeles U.S.A causing mayhem and chaos everywhere. Many are feared dead. Scientist's using a seismograph reported it measured 6.5 on the Richter Scale.

The earthquake happened when the Pacific and American plates collided at the focus. Shockwaves were felt over a 50 mile radius, from the epicenter.

One eye-witness said that late that night, around 11.00 pm, the first tremor was felt. "Buildings began to sway and people everywhere were screaming and running for cover."

Emergency officials say hundreds of people are feared dead and thousands more injured in the earthquake. People attending a football match in the city's stadium of Light were trapped for many hours. Rescue attempts are continuing throughout the day.

Authorities have ordered the evacuation of the Southern part of the city due to severe damage and flooding

Your reporter in Los Angeles

Feedback for student

- You have presented your work well, with appropriate heading and layout.
- You have written a realistic account of how a place might look in the immediate aftermath of an earthquake. Well done.
- You have identified the location and time and you have named the plates involved.

for learning

- You have managed to include all the key terms and you have added an additional one. Well done!
- In order to improve your work further, in paragraph three, you could refer to other specific pieces of damage in more detail. What other damage could an earthquake cause?

Comment

This is a good piece of work that, as we can see, the teacher praises in the feedback for the student. While the criteria for success have been met, the teacher identifies an area that could be improved upon and gives the student a prompt in the form of a question. This approach makes the students think and helps them become more autonomous in their learning.

Now, here is the teacher's reflection on the standard of this piece of work, presented as a commentary for colleagues:

Commentary for teachers

- This is a very good piece of work that illustrates a high level of understanding of the task and material. It would merit a high level of success as the student has fully met four of the five criteria
- For a higher performance the student could have given more examples of damage caused by the earthquake
- The use of the key terms as set out in the criteria for success indicates a high level of understanding. The student also uses the additional term *tremor*.

An example from a 1st Year French class

Syllabus area: Letter Writing

Topic: The House.

Learning intention: Students will practice the layout and structure of writing a letter in French. They will use vocabulary pertaining to the house and will demonstrate ability to use the present tense.

Criteria for success:

Students will be able to:

- give a good description of their house and bedroom using an appropriate range of vocabulary
- use the present tense accurately
- demonstrate an ability to use adjectives correctly
- follow the rules for structuring a letter as they have been taught (date, greeting, body of letter and salutation).

Task: Write a letter to your French pen pal describing the house you live in, some of the rooms in the house and your bedroom. Finally, ask your pen pal some questions.

Conditions under which the students completed the task:

Having completed the topic 'The house' and having practised how to structure a letter correctly, the students are given the task as homework.

Comment

To the right you will see an example of student work that is a successful response to the task, although not all the criteria for success have been met. If you are a French teacher or even if you only know some French (you don't need to be fluent!), you might like to consider the student's work against the criteria set by the teacher. What would you say that would help the student improve their work even further?

In giving feedback to this student, the teacher has referred to the criteria for success and has also developed a symbol-based system to highlight specific linguistic points that the student needs to address. The target language,

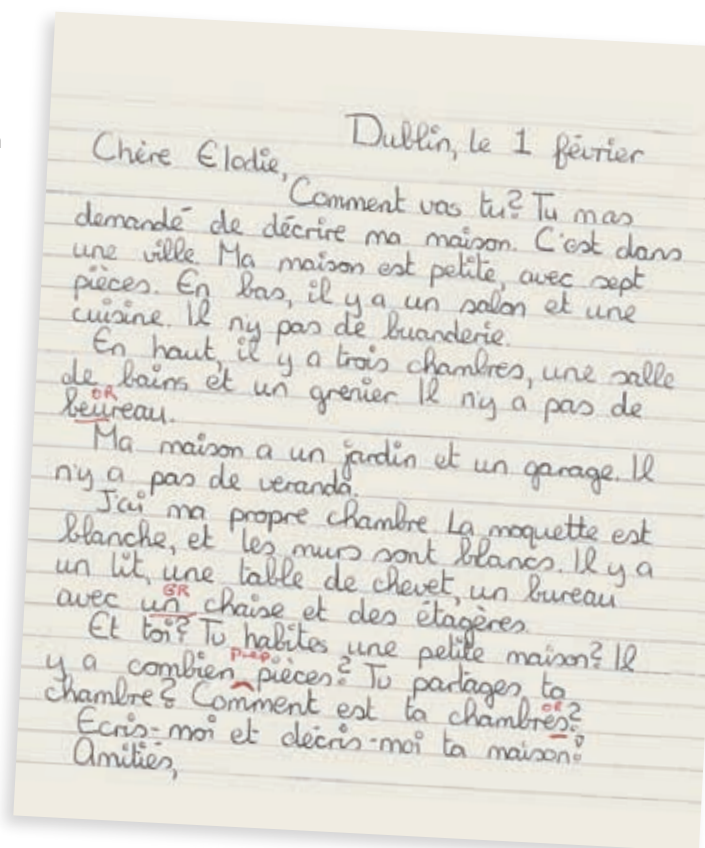
in this case French, is used to give feedback to the student. For this reason, the teacher's comments are expressed in simple French so that the student can understand them. This approach is meant to encourage target language use in every aspect of language teaching and learning.

Feedback for student

- La présentation et la structure de la lettre sont excellentes.
- Tu utilises bien le présent
- Les verbes et les accords des adjectifs sont corrects. Bravo!
- La construction des questions est très bonne. Bon travail!
- Il faut décrire les autres pièces de la maison.
- Plus de détails sur ta chambre!



LA MAISON



OR. Attention à l'orthographe!

GR. Attention à la grammaire!

Chaise, c'est un mot féminin!

PRÉP. Quelle préposition après *combien*?

Comment

At the beginning of the feedback, the teacher praises the student for the aspects of the work that have been successful. Then, the teacher indicates what criteria for success have not been fully met by the student. Finally, the teacher indicates what linguistic aspects the student might need to improve upon in order to enhance their work.

Now, here is the teacher's reflection on the standard of this piece of work, presented as a commentary for colleagues:

Commentary for teachers

- The layout of the letter is excellent, with adequate paragraphing.
- The student makes good use of accurate grammatical structures. There is only one misspelt word: *beureau*; the other errors relate to gender and number of nouns. Question formation has been demonstrated accurately and agreement of adjectives has been adhered to.
- Some of the criteria for success have not been met. The student has not described some other rooms in their house. There is also limited information regarding their bedroom; it could be more fully developed, considering they have learnt a good range of vocabulary.

- If the student had described other items of furniture in their room, more evidence of accurate forms of grammar and agreement of adjectives could have been demonstrated.

Comment

The two examples of practice shown on these pages will join examples collected from teachers in other junior cycle subject areas on our website as soon as the collection and development process is completed.

In the meantime, if you would like further information on Assessment for Learning you can consult our website or email us at: newsletter@ncca.ie.

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