

Assessment for Learning in the Foundation Stage

It is important to acknowledge that young children come to school from a variety of different backgrounds and diverse learning experiences. It is therefore essential to take cognisance of the information shared by the child's pre-school provider, parent/carer and other professionals.

Assessment of Learning (summative assessment) takes place *after* the learning and tells us what has been achieved. Its core purpose is to prove or measure the learning that has taken place and is most often adult directed.

Assessment for Learning (formative assessment) takes place when learning *is* happening and '...is a process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners and their teachers to decide where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go and how to get there.'
(Assessment Reform Group, 2001)

Summative and formative assessment are not opposing or contradictory practices but are complementary approaches. Shirley Clarke (*Unlocking Formative Assessment*, 2001) illustrates this in the following gardening analogy: '...if we think of our children as plants ... **summative** assessment of the plants is the process of simply measuring them. The measurements might be interesting to compare and analyse, but in themselves, they do not affect the growth of the plants. **Formative** assessment on the other hand, is the garden equivalent of feeding and watering plants-directly affecting their growth.'

The key elements of Assessment for Learning are:

- sharing learning intentions (p8-11)
- sharing success criteria (p12-14)
- formative feedback (p15-20)
- effective questioning (AfL p21-25 and TS&PC p29)
- helping children reflect on their learning (p26-32)

(AfL and TS&PC for KS1&2 from Curriculum Support and Implementation Box)

AfL in the context of the Foundation Stage

As AfL is a complex process which will take time to develop, Y1&2 provide the opportunity to lay the necessary foundations for children's language and thinking. During the Foundation Stage the emphasis should therefore be on establishing a supportive climate of sensitive interaction, openness and risk-taking in which adults engage in dialogue with children about their learning. Classroom strategies will include planning with the children, modelling, effective use of questioning, plenary sessions and conversations with individuals and groups.

Learning intentions describe what children will know, understand or be able to do and may be shared with the whole class, groups or individuals. Sharing learning intentions is appropriate when introducing significant or new learning but is not necessary in every lesson. Whilst working with groups or individuals, particularly in play, learning intentions may evolve from the children's responses. Teachers should consider how learning intentions may be displayed in appropriate ways as children progress through the Foundation Stage.

Success criteria are the steps required to achieve the learning intention and offer explicit guidance on how to be successful. They summarise the main teaching points or processes and they always relate directly to the learning intention. The process of understanding success criteria takes time and needs to be developed. Modelling by the adult is particularly important for helping children in the Foundation Stage understand the value and purpose of success criteria. Success criteria may not always be in written form and teachers may use photographs or images to illustrate the process.

Formative feedback is essential for effective learning and teaching as it can motivate children by building self esteem and reinforcing the positive aspects. Formative feedback focuses on how the children have met the success criteria in relation to the identified learning intention and offers advice on the next steps in the learning process. Time should also be allowed for the child to make improvements. In the Foundation Stage feedback should primarily be oral and should take place throughout the learning process.

Effective questioning, as an integral part of assessment practice, serves two main purposes: to assist with assessment and to improve understanding. A learning climate, which promotes sensitive interaction and encourages risk-taking, can influence how successfully questioning is used and how beneficial it is to children's learning. Modelling how to think aloud and how to frame questions is essential to enable children to develop the appropriate vocabulary for questioning. Adults should engage children in reflective discussion about their learning and make judgements on what children understand and can do.

Reflection on learning is an important element of AfL; it promotes independent learning, communication and support in the classroom. The focus in the Foundation Stage should be on building an open reflective climate in which adults model appropriate language and behaviour. It can be developed through peer and self assessment and evaluation which will most often be oral in the Foundation Stage. Assessment enables children to reflect on *what* has been learned and when appropriate, judge it against a set of criteria. Evaluation describes the process children use to gain an understanding of *how* they are learning. Both are equally important for children's development.

