

ASSESSMENT & LEARNING Pocketbook

2nd edition

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Assessment and Learning



Learning Intentions and Success Criteria



Quality Interaction



Verbal Feedback



Written Feedback



Assessment by Pupils



Getting Started

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Why do we assess?



Assessment plays an essential part in education generally and in learning and teaching particularly. Teachers and schools are expected to assess students' learning for a range of purposes and for a range of audiences.

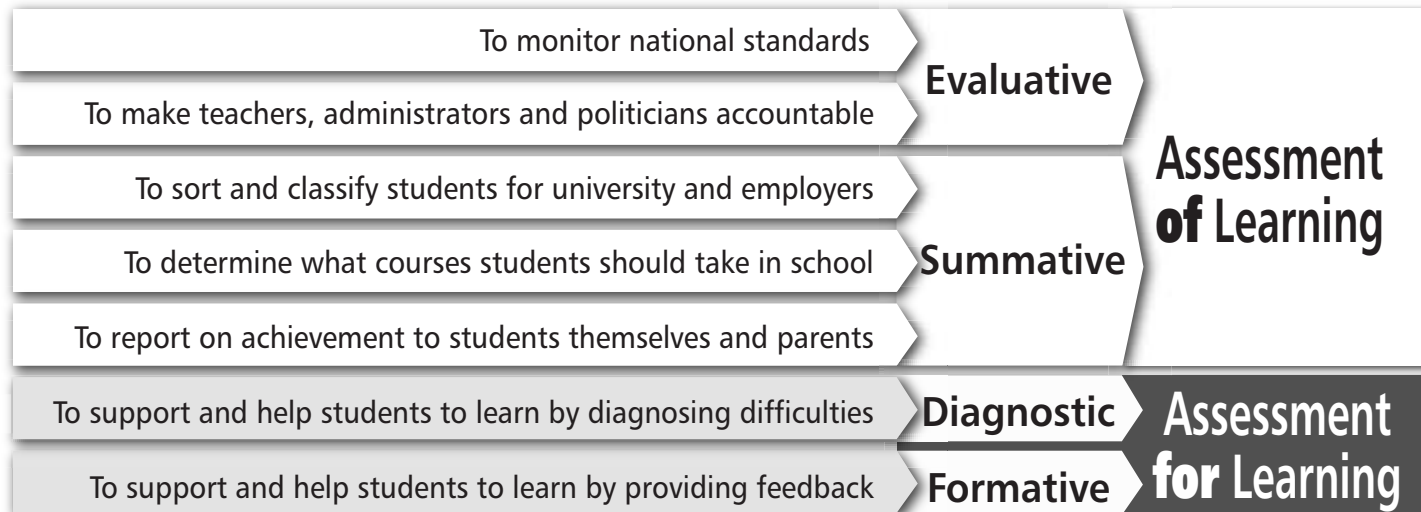
Assessment primarily carried out to help pupils to learn is usually called **formative assessment** or **assessment for learning**.

Assessment which is primarily for other purposes is often called **summative assessment** or **assessment of learning**.



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Why do we assess?



There's a growing acceptance that education systems throughout the world place too much emphasis on assessment *of* learning and too little emphasis on assessment *for* learning. This book looks at how schools and teachers can redress the balance.

But first let's look at why we need to.

Assessment 'of' and 'for' learning



Many people find it difficult to see the difference between summative and formative assessment. After all, the same results or the same evidence can often be used by different people for both purposes.

But the two kinds of assessment are quite different. They involve teachers and pupils asking very different questions about themselves and about what they should do next.

Assessment of learning (summative)

Mainly about evaluating performance.

Backward looking. Usually comes at the end of a piece of work.

Key questions:

- 'How good am I at this?'
- 'Is she working to level B yet?'
- 'Can he do his six times table?'

Assessment for learning (formative)

Mainly about supporting improvement.

Forward looking. Usually takes place continually as you are learning.

Key questions:

- 'How have I progressed?'
- 'What difficulties is she still having?'
- 'What help does he need now?'

Exams and tests



We cannot run our education system without tests and examinations. But there's increasing support for the view that too much emphasis on summative assessment is not only unwise, it can be destructive.

Much assessment *of* learning leads to an emphasis on **performance** and too often is used simply to **identify failure**. It:

- Provides feedback in the form of grades or marks or levels and encourages comparisons and competition
- Is administered by the teacher and comes at the end of a chunk of learning
- Can lead learners who lack confidence in their ability to opt out or 'retire hurt'

By contrast, assessment *for* learning is constructive because it focuses mainly on **improvement** and is used to **support progress**. It:

- Helps learners to know how well they have learned and provides feedback on how they can do better
- Encourages learners to support and help each other while they are learning
- Builds self-motivation, self-confidence and self-reliance

Why assessment can be damaging



A seminal study of the effects of the two kinds of assessment on classroom learning in over 20 countries was published by King's College in 1998*. It pointed out that an over-emphasis on assessment of learning in schools had had a negative impact on the motivation of both pupils and teachers:

Implications for pupils' motives

When assessment is being used by someone else to **evaluate** your learning, if you lack confidence you are more likely to:

- Hide what you don't know and find difficult
- Always look for the right answer
- Focus on your mark or your grade
- Want to know your place in the class

When assessment is being used to help you **improve** your learning, even if you are under-confident you are more likely to:

- Be honest about what you don't understand
- Be open to lots of ideas or answers
- Focus on the teacher's comments
- Want to know how you have done in comparison to how you did before

*Black P and Wiliam D (1998a) *Assessment and Classroom Learning*. *Assessment in Education, Principles, Policy and Practice*, 5(1) 7-73

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Why assessment can be damaging



Implications for teachers' motives

When assessment is being used by someone else to **evaluate** your teaching, if you lack confidence you are more likely to:

- Find the right label for the work, eg *'This is a 'D''*
- Get your evidence in writing
- Test as late as possible - when you are sure they will succeed
- Tell them what is coming up
- Teach to the test
- Be concerned about how well your class has performed in relation to others or to the national norm

When assessment is being used to help you **improve** your teaching, even if you are under-confident you are more likely to:

- Work out how to help a child improve, eg *'How could this become a 'C'?'*
- Collect lots of informal evidence from questioning, listening and observing
- Test half way through a topic to help you identify difficulties early on
- Spring a test on them so it is a true test
- Teach the topic but respond to children's interests
- Be concerned about what difficulties your class has had and how you can use that information to improve your teaching and their learning

Balancing summative and formative assessment



The fact that this pocketbook focuses on developing assessment for learning does not imply that assessment of learning is worthless or necessarily detrimental.



Pupils need to know how well they are doing, as do parents and teachers. Employers, colleges and universities need results from examinations to decide which candidates are likely to be suitable for jobs or courses. Schools and teachers need to be accountable. However, do pupils need to know where they stand **all** the time?



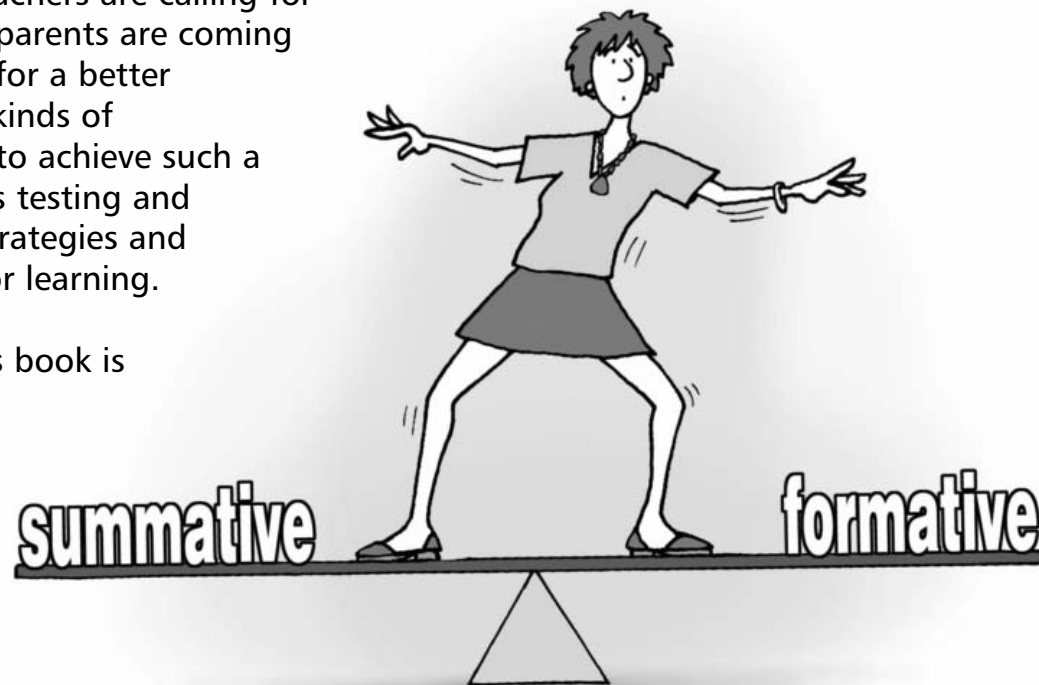
Do we need to keep pulling the plant up to see if it is growing?

Balancing summative and formative assessment



What educationists and teachers are calling for – and what more and more parents are coming to recognise – is the need for a better balance between the two kinds of assessment. They see that to achieve such a balance we need to do less testing and instead help expand our strategies and techniques for assessing for learning.

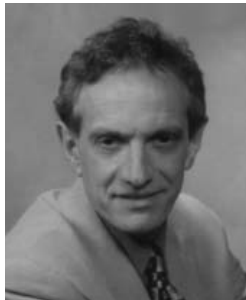
That's what the rest of this book is about. So let's start by defining in more detail what assessment for learning looks like in practice.



About the author



The late Ian Smith



Ian was one of Scotland's foremost teacher educators. He founded Learning Unlimited (now incorporated in Cambridge Education), which was dubbed '*Scotland's most successful teacher development agency*' by the Times Educational Supplement, Scotland.

Ian worked in Scottish education for almost 35 years as a secondary teacher and in various posts at national level.

He wrote a range of publications for teachers on various aspects of motivation, assessment and learning and was renowned for running interactive seminars and workshops with large groups of teachers on learning and teaching methodologies. He worked with over 45,000 of Scotland's teachers face-to-face and ran workshops in the United States, Hong Kong, China and Russia.

Acknowledgement

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