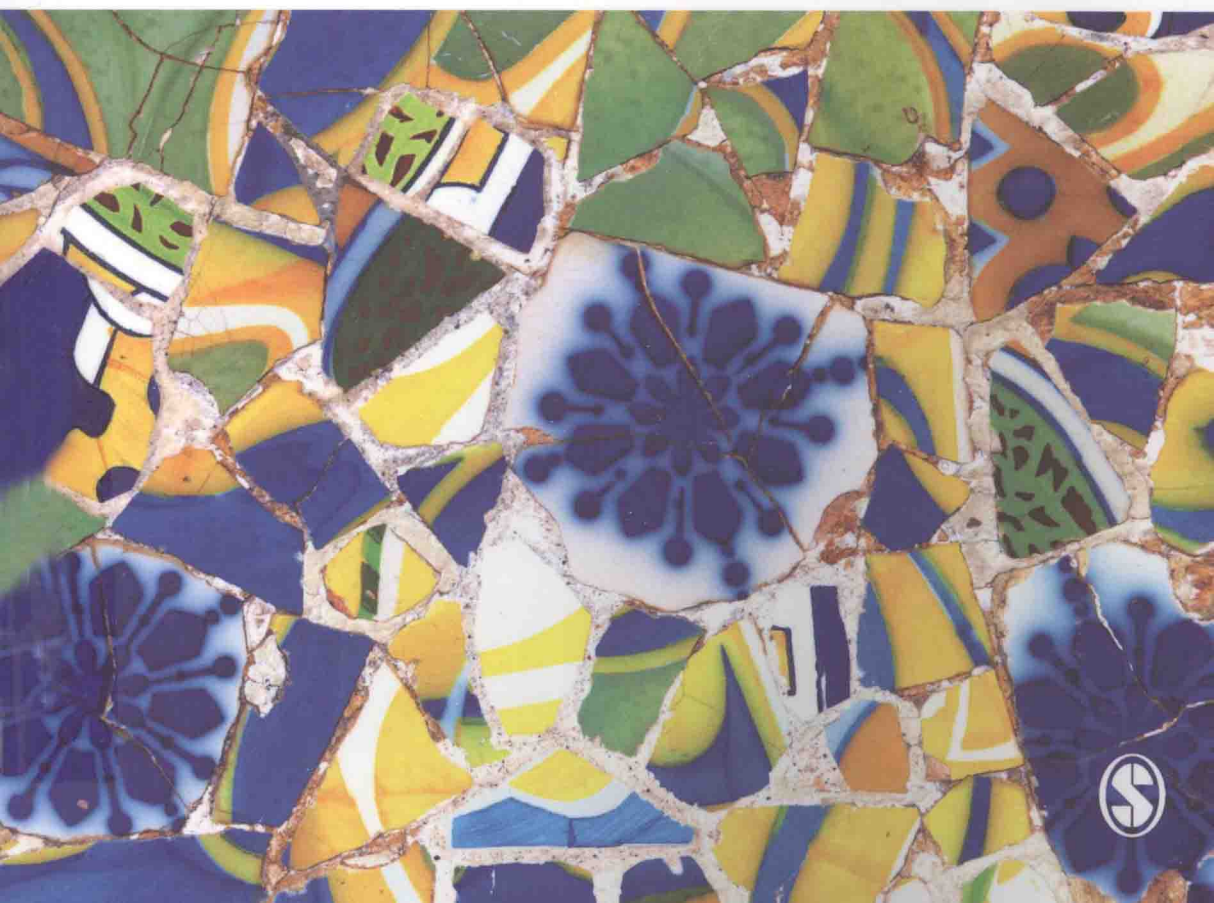


BILL BOYLE & MARIE CHARLES

Formative Assessment *for* **Teaching & Learning**



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Formative Assessment Teaching & Learning



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About the Authors

Professor Bill Boyle holds the Chair of Educational Assessment and is Director of the Centre for Formative Assessment Studies(CFAS) in the School of Education at the University of Manchester, UK. The CFAS is the oldest research centre (founded 1988) in the UK for supporting teachers, teacher trainers, schools and policy makers in using formative teaching, learning and assessment and is involved in supporting the development of formative assessment in the UK and in many countries around the globe. Professor Boyle and his co-author, Marie Charles, publish their research work in academic and practitioner journals, present at international conferences and workshops, and design and support developments in formative teaching, learning and assessment. Currently, they are working with colleagues in Russia, Armenia, Oman, Saudi Arabia and the USA on understanding, training and using formative strategies for more effective teaching and learning.

Marie Charles is a teacher, formative assessment researcher and consultant and an author whose work demonstrates that she believes passionately in the learner (rather than measurement or grading) being at the centre of the education process – a belief that she carries into her classroom practice.

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Introduction

This book focuses on the recognition of the importance of formative assessment in the process of effective teaching and learning and our aim is to build practitioners' understanding and capacity to use formative assessment in that process. Despite the strategies, myths and gimmicks that have been operationalised in its name, formative assessment is a simple concept. To borrow a quotation from Philippe Perrenoud: 'Any assessment that helps a pupil to learn and develop is formative' (1991, p. 80). It is important that teachers know and understand how formative assessment helps the child to learn and how feedback from assessment supports that learning process.

In 2005, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) issued the following Policy Brief (November 2005) which addressed the role of formative assessment in improving learning in classrooms, the issues of what is involved in formative assessment in practice, and how policy can promote formative assessment and hence effective teaching and assessment systems:

Tests and examinations are a classic way of measuring student progress and are integral to accountability of schools and the education systems. ... To be truly effective, assessment should be 'formative' – in other words, identifying and responding to the students' learning needs. In classrooms featuring formative assessment, teachers make frequent, interactive assessments of student understanding. This enables teachers to adjust their teaching to meet individual student needs ... Teachers also actively involve students in the process, helping them to develop skills that enable them to learn better (OECD 2005, p. 1).

The OECD Policy Brief further stressed that formative assessment needs to be practised systematically in international education systems and that it should be used as a framework for teaching. Following this approach, teachers would begin to change the ways in which they interacted with pupils, how they set up learning situations and 'scaffolded' pupils towards learning goals and 'even how they define student success' (2005, p. 1) These beliefs are at the heart of this book.

We believe that children's learning needs have to be at the core of successful teaching and learning. Therefore it is important to consider and reflect on definitions of the act of teaching:

Teaching involves a search for meaning in the world. Teaching is a life project, a calling, a vocation that is an organising centre of all other activities. Teaching is past and future as well as present. It is background as well as foreground. It is depth as well as surface. Teaching is pain and humour, joy and anger, dreariness and epiphany. Teaching is world-building, it is architecture and design, it is purpose and moral enterprise. Teaching is a way of being in the world that breaks through the boundaries of a traditional job and in the process re-defines all life and teaching itself. (Ayers 2008, p. 6)

It is within this humanistic framework (Boyle & Charles 2011) that formative assessment has to be located and seen as an integral cog in the cognitive, affective and conative environment of the learner.

Formative assessment through its structural philosophy of evidence elicitation, analysis and action supplies the strategy to make teaching effective and learning deep and sustained. Formative assessment is much more embedded within pedagogy than the simplistic mantra of 'closing the gap' in standards-based measurement which tends to accompany descriptions of its effect on teaching and learning. Formative assessment has to be theorised, understood and practised within the perspective of situated teaching and learning for its full social and cultural effect on the learner as individual to be understood. This is not a statement of rhetoric, it forms the core of our philosophy as teachers and it informed our pedagogical practice in the classroom. This is central to the support and advice we offer to schools and teachers, colleagues and ministries of education all round the globe. We believe that teachers need to have (and constantly revisit, reflect and reinforce) a philosophy of teaching and learning of their own to provide a purpose and rationale for their pedagogy. We are concerned about the misunderstandings that teachers have about the definition or definitions of assessments, and therefore the uses, purposes and practices of assessment. What is formative assessment? How is formative assessment commonly understood? Many times we have heard teachers state in workshops or seminars that formative assessment 'informs next steps'. What are those 'next steps' based on? What types of information (evidence) is the teacher working from to support their pupils through the 'next steps'?

This is not a 'how to do formative assessment' manual in the traditional sense, however. This book shows how an understanding of formative teaching, learning and assessment can enrich normal day-to-day teaching and learning situations. The chapters (which include case studies) are based on observed teaching situations in which the authors have been involved as researchers, and within each case the formative strategies are identified and analysed for the reader.

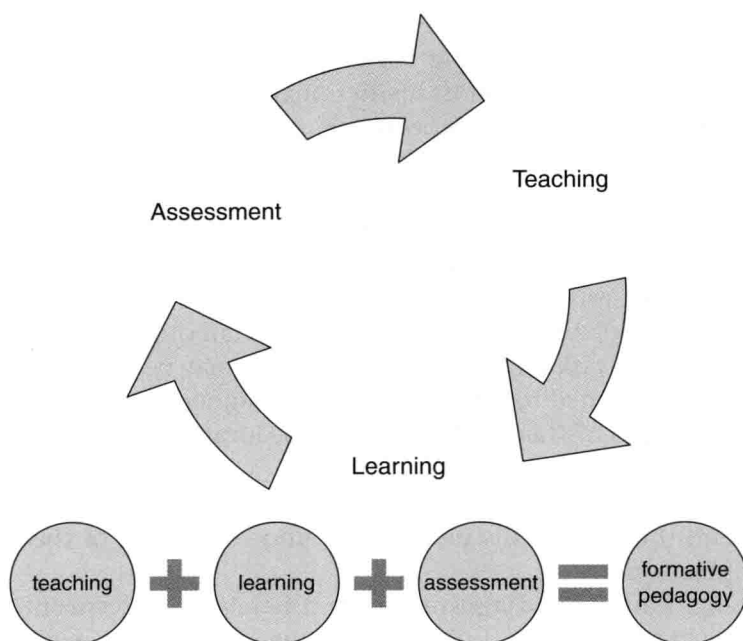


Figure 1.1 Integration of Teaching, Learning and Assessment

Structure and content

The structure of the book is based on a sequence of chapters on aspects of formative assessment which are illustrated by case studies of classroom practice or classroom research projects. Each of these chapters shows how to integrate the strategies which the authors (for manageability and coherence) call their 'formative assessment toolkit'. These strategies, although written in isolation for explication purposes in separate chapters of this book, are intended to be combined in classroom practice to comprise a pedagogical formative toolkit. The strategies are: guided group teaching, differentiation, observation and evidence elicitation, analysis and feedback, co-construction, reflective planning, self-regulation and dialogue and dialogic.

Assessment or learning?

What is assessment? What is formative assessment? What does assessment in support of learning really mean? How can teachers use or make use of assessment in their classrooms? What is teacher assessment? What is the purpose of teacher assessment? Teacher assessment is criterion-referenced: a pupil is assessed in relation to a criterion and not in relation

to other pupils. The teacher can then share responsibility for the learning with the child by 'feeding back' specific support information to enable the child to move on in his/her next learning steps.

Development of learning depends on many interrelated factors. An assessment that optimises one or more of these factors is formative. 'Anything that influences the working conditions, the meaning of the activity or the pupil's self-image is just as important as the material and cognitive aspects of the teaching situation' (Perrenoud 1991, p. 80). There are many ways to support a pupil to progress his/her learning. These include explaining a concept in more detail or in another way, or setting a different task for the concept. This task may be more motivating or just better matched to his/her ability. The student may need reassurance or a boost to his/her confidence or to be located in a different social learning environment or relationship.

In this book we offer explanations and suggested solutions to explore and extend the readers' discussions and understandings of these pedagogical practices.

Teaching, learning and assessment are interrelated. Assessment should be integrated into teaching and learning activities. The assessment activity should arise from what is going on in the pupils' current learning activity; an assessment task should build on a pupil's previous experience; an assessment task must be clearly introduced to the pupils – they need to understand what is expected of them. Teacher assessment is *not* based on a traditional testing model. Teacher assessment is continuous and classroom life goes on as usual while teaching and learning are modified based on the 'ongoing' assessments carried out by the teacher.

Teachers need to understand how they can change the culture of their classrooms from one in which pupils are being passively prepared against testable curriculum sub-domains. How can teachers move to a situation in which pupils become active learners, with learning deepened and enriched by assessment information? How can this information be gathered from dialogue between teacher and pupil and from pupil working collaboratively with pupil? What makes this assessment 'in support of learning', formative?

There is no entity called 'assessment' which exists on its own and stands alone as a process, independent of teaching and learning. There is the paradigm of 'testing', which is not the same thing as assessment – although the last decade might have made one think otherwise (Hall et al. 2004). The whole and only purpose of assessment is to produce information which is then used to support student and teacher in the learning process. This is assessment as one of an integrated set of processes labelled 'teaching, learning and assessment', which are mutually linked and supportive of assessment. Assessment in support of teaching and learning puts the child and his or her learning needs at the centre of teaching and learning so that the child becomes actively involved in their own learning.

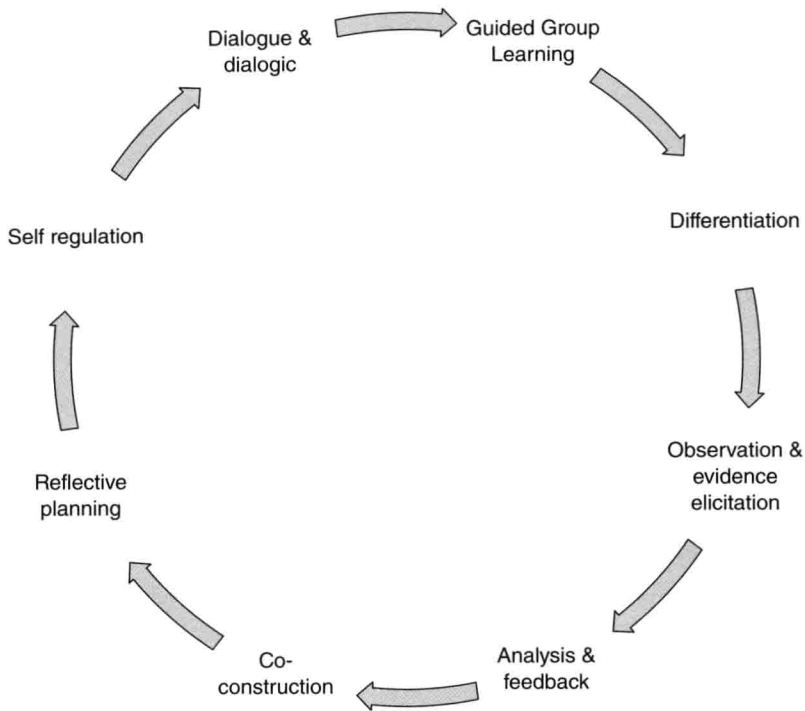


Figure I.2 The inter-connected concepts of formative assessment

That sounds fine as rhetoric but what is it that enables assessment to support learning? One suggested response could be that through formative assessment principles, teachers access specific information on children's learning processes. They then use this information to support their interventions in the pupils' learning processes, actions and activities. The strategies through which teachers access, process, focus and use that information to intervene appropriately in pupil learning are assessment integrated with teaching and learning. In Chapter 2 we explore this aspect through the vehicle of guided group pedagogy. In Chapter 3 we introduce differentiation as a planned but flexible process which is expressed through a guided group methodology supported by analysis and feedback (Chapter 5). The use of a critical lens (observation and evidence elicitation: Chapter 4) is explored. Effective assessment enables teachers to refine their micro observations and to reflect on and revise their planning according to learning needs (Chapter 7: reflective practice).

Concerned that teacher talk is dominating classrooms, we explore the concepts of dialogue and dialogic (Chapter 9) as tools to support the emergence of the learner (self-regulated learning: Chapter 8) and a changing of regulation in the pedagogic transactions (co-construction: Chapter 6) between teacher and pupil.

1

What is Formative Assessment?

In this chapter we look at different ideas about formative assessment and consider teacher beliefs about formative assessment.

Sharing definitions

We carried out a research survey in UK primary schools in 2008 – five years after assessment for learning had been formally introduced into the national teaching and learning agenda through the Primary strategy: ‘Excellence and Enjoyment’ (DfES 2003) – to investigate how standardised the definition of formative assessment was across schools. The results were surprising, with a wide range of definitions expressed by teachers. It is essential, therefore, that formative assessment has a clear definition so that its practice can be understood and improved by teachers. The literature in the research field offers several interpretations and definitions. For example, Coffey et al. (2011) suggest that ‘formative assessment should be understood and presented as nothing other than genuine engagement with ideas, which includes being responsive to them and using them to inform next moves’ (p. 1129), while US researcher James Popham’s definition states clearly that ‘formative assessment is not a test but a process that produces not so much a score but a qualitative insight into student understanding’ (Popham 2008, p. 6). The process and outcomes of formative assessment are the focus for Bennett whose definition links the teaching, learning and assessment activity: ‘formative assessment involves a combination of task and instrument and process’ (2011, p. 7)

According to socio-constructivist learning theory, individuals assimilate knowledge and concepts after restructuring and reorganising it through negotiation with their surroundings, including fellow learners



(Hager & Hodkinson 2009; Rogoff 1990). All children do not learn all that is taught and teachers cannot know what and how well concepts are understood without using some process to establish pupil understanding. Since each pupil has his/her own unique socially constructed context, ideas, concepts and meanings are not fixed nor standardised across a group or class of pupils. Therefore the individual outcomes of learning situations will be diverse. The word 'assessment' derives from the Latin word 'assidere' meaning 'to sit beside' – this can be taken to imply a close proximity or association between the assessor and the learner in the assessment process (Good 2011).

Criticism of an assessment process which had traditionally been designed to grade and certificate led to the emergence of formative assessment, a concept designed to support pupils' learning processes. 'Beginning in the 1960s researchers and authors from a range of disciplinary backgrounds weighed in against the proliferation of classification practices stemming from the American psychometric current, thus opening the way to prioritising assessments that measured students' learning' (Morrisette 2011, p. 249). These researchers included, in sociology, Becker (1963), Bourdieu and Passeron (1970), Perrenoud (1998, 2004), in anthropology, Rist (1977), in palaeontology, Gould (1981), in philosophy, Foucault (1975), and in evaluation Crooks (1988), Mehan (1971), and Popham (2008) have drawn attention to issues such as the consequences of testing practices on narrowing classroom pedagogy and culture.

For example the secondary adaptations (plagiarism, cramming) that pupils develop in a context which continually threatens their integrity and self-esteem; the cultural biases of the tests used to assess their learning; the 'instrumental illusion' that is, the ingrained belief that it is possible to exclude all the interpretive processes which are necessarily involved in these practices; and finally the power ascribed to evaluation practices that, on the one hand, contribute to a form of control and standardisation and on the other, perpetuate social disparities. (Morrisette 2011, p. 249)

From these beginnings, there has been an increasing interest in the formative principles and functions of assessment serving to support children's learning rather than to grade pupil outcomes.

Research on formative assessment practices has covered a range of disparate approaches: a focus on the choice of tasks and the context in which they are carried out (Wiggins 1998); formative assessment as a means of modelling, designing and supporting professional development (Ash & Levitt 2003; Boyle et al. 2005); assessment criteria (Torrance & Pryor 2001); the feedback provided to pupils (Hattie & Timperley 2007); and pupils' views about assessment (Cowie 2005).

Linda Allal (1988) has produced a typology of remediation post-assessment of a learning objective for a concept as follows:

- **Retroactive adjustment:** which takes place after a shorter or longer learning sequence, on the basis of micro-summative evaluation
- **Interactive adjustment:** which takes place through the learning process
- **Proactive adjustment:** which takes place when the pupil is set an activity or enters a teaching situation.

These three methods may be combined and none of them are to be associated with a stereotyped procedure. Retroactive adjustment may take the form of a criterion-referenced test followed by remediation. Retroactive adjustment may mean going over much earlier material and temporarily refraining from 'pushing' the child to learn things that may cause him/her problems. It may also entail adjusting other aspects of the teaching situation or even the child's progress through the school.

Enlarged understandings of formative assessment

How assessment links to and is an ongoing inherent aspect of teaching and learning is a perennial issue. In this debate, the definition and role of assessment are crucial. A reductionist definition of assessment with its aim defined as an increase in learner 'performance' measured as test data is too narrow a concept to guide teaching. In England, despite the desire and the recommendation of the Task Group on Assessment and Testing (DES 1988) the reduction of assessment to being viewed as synonymous with 'testing' and a one-dimensional view of 'performance' is exactly the situation that has become reality in the 25 years since TGAT reported.

The TGAT proposed that teachers should assess only that which is observable. Teaching decisions, especially the decision to move on to the next part of the curriculum, should always be based on an assessment, no matter how informal, of the learner's response to the current activity. It is that assessment of current achievement which is the basic building block of any assessment system in the context of a National Curriculum. Assessment in the context of the National Curriculum was not designed to predict how a learner will do in later life, by trying in some way to measure ability or effort. National Curriculum Assessment was intended as a means of demonstrating how children were progressing through the level structure of the entitlement curriculum. However, it has ceased to be criterion-referenced (definition) and now serves as a means of norm-referencing children and schools.

Formative assessment was legitimised and became part of the education policy makers' and teaching fraternity's lexicon through the seminal Task Group on Assessment and Testing report (DES 1988) which developed the assessment system for the National Curriculum encompassed by

the 1988 Education Reform Act (DES 1988). However, with the commencement of paper and pencil testing of the National Curriculum (the 'sats') in 1991, soon the only form of 'assessment' which mattered was summative and this was embodied in the end of key stage tests. These quickly became a 'high stakes' priority for schools who felt pressured by both Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education) and the government who used the test results as the principal (often, it appeared to teachers, the sole) measure of national standards and each school's success or failure. This was a very one-dimensional 'standards agenda' as its sole focus was on a school's test scores based on the sub-domains of English and mathematics measured against arbitrarily set national percentage targets.

Officially, summative Teacher Assessment (TA) has 'parity' (Dearing 1994) with the test outcomes – but the school performance 'league' tables use only the test data. The (non-formative) purpose of TA was designed to be the holistic award of a teacher judgement 'level' for each child at the end of the school year. This attainment judgement was based on the child's progression through an 8-level scale, the judgements to be made as a 'best fit' of the child's 'performance' against a prose paragraph describing performance at each level (Boyle 2008; Hall & Harding 2002). This task required standardisation of definitions of quality (at school, regional and national levels) for any judgements to be transferable as reliable and valid. 'Unless teachers come to this understanding and learn how to abstract the qualities that run across cases with different surface features but which are judged equivalent they can hardly be said to appreciate the concept of quality' (Sadler 1989, p. 128). This necessitated dialogue, communication and collaboration by teachers with their colleagues within and essentially across schools and as this strategy was financially unsupported by central government it was soon 'dismissed' by teachers. Their reasons included 'workload', difficulties of communication, administration and logistics of meetings to share understandings and meanings of children's work. Significantly, the 'sats' scores were conveniently received by schools before the date for national returns of TA, enabling schools to avoid disagreement between test and TA and reduce workload by returning as near a match as possible across the two scores (Reeves et al., 2001). The test and TA reported levels were in accord so there appeared to be no need to further investigate a school's performance. The TA process has become even further complicated with the introduction of Assessing Pupil Performance (APP), a government strategy which stresses the making of judgements at sub-levels (2a, 2b, 2c) and then at sub-sub-levels, e.g. high 2c, secure 2c, low 2c.

Both summative and formative approaches to assessment are important. Summative assessments are 'an efficient way to identify students' skills at key transition points such as entry into the world