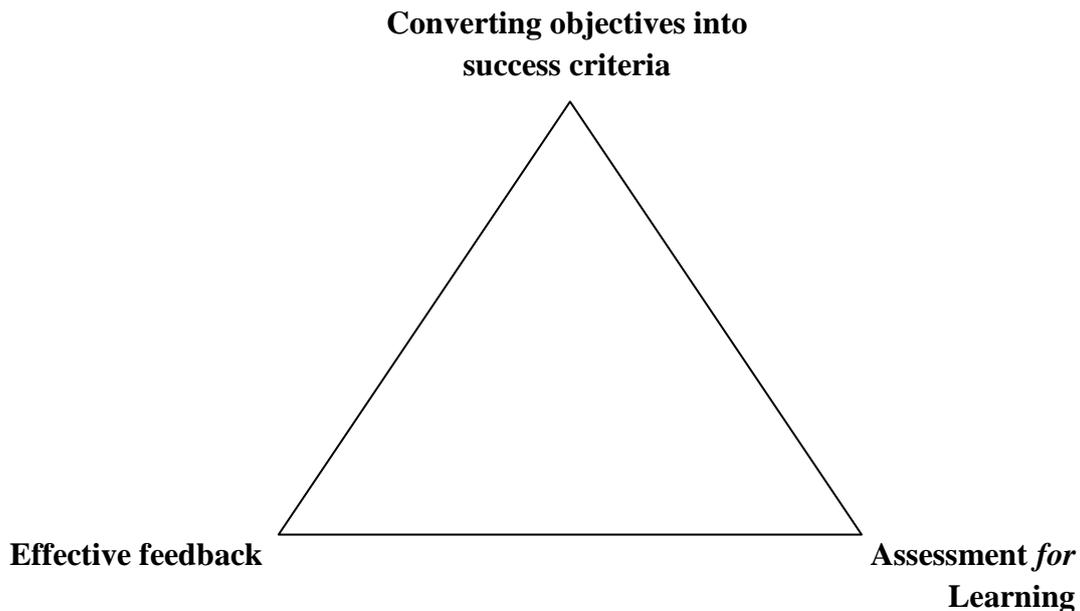


Foreword by Maurice Galton

This publication, now the third in the series, again offers a great deal of evidence concerning the ways in which judgements about pupils' performance, what we more usually term assessments, can be used for a variety of purposes beyond that of making summative evaluations by placing individuals in rank order of merit. It is of significance that some of the contributions have been penned by classroom practitioners. This suggests that although the pressures to 'drive up standards', identified in the opening article by Gordon Stobart, militate against endeavours to develop assessment practices which provide pupils with the tools for evaluating their own learning, there are, nevertheless, schools in Hong Kong where various forms of formative assessment are being promoted. My own experience in recent visits confirms that slowly but surely this transformation is taking place.

There are schools using peer marking, others recognising the value of Wiliam's (2011) advice that all forms of assessment feedback should require the recipient (the pupil) to make more effort than the donor (the teacher) by using the system of highlighting not more than three aspects of the pupil's work in need of improvement, while others are contemplating the introduction of 'learning logs' Mok (2010). Yet in all schools visited, Principals have insisted that pupils' work should also be assessed in more traditional ways to avoid possible confrontation with parents who are more concerned with the fairness of the examination system than the value of these newer forms of assessment to their siblings. Consequently teachers who are pioneering new approaches to assessment are often faced with increased workloads.

The editors of the present volume are therefore to be congratulated in offering several contributions which identify ways in which technology can help in the assessment process, thus easing the burden on teachers.



Another theme concerns the ‘three stages of learning’, where the importance of translating learning goals into ‘success criteria’ is stressed. Indeed, without the identification of such criteria, it is virtually impossible for pupils to arrive at a judgement about what they must do to improve on their present performance.

The provision of effective feedback by the teacher, based on these success criteria, which then results in the active involvement of pupils in decisions about their learning is therefore the third and mediating stage in making an Assessment for Learning (Clarke, 2008).

Much work has been undertaken into the relevance and usefulness of feedback, notably by John Hattie in his meta-analysis of effective teaching practices. Hattie and Timperley (2007), in what has become a classic among research papers, regard feedback as serving three main purposes. The first of these, *feeding upwards*, has to do with setting success criteria. If pupils know what is expected of them they can track their performance. The second purpose, *feeding backwards*, indicates to pupils how they are doing and involves information about a pupil’s progress or advice on what to do next. The final element, *feeding forwards*, provides information which on future occasions allows pupils to exercise more control over their learning by choice of appropriate strategies and develops their ability to spot errors. This is an essential step on the road to becoming an autonomous learner.

My own observations suggest that more attention needs to be given to ways of establishing ‘success criteria’. This could perhaps be a key theme for a future issue. I particularly like the process suggested by Wiliam (2011) where the teacher provides two or three pieces of work of varying standard from children in the previous year, blanks out all marks and comments, and asks the current pupils to work out the reasons why s/he judged one pupil’s efforts to be more deserving than another’s.

Another area where more work is required concerns the kinds of supportive social-emotional climate required to make possible the effective use of AfL. As the Stobart paper reminds us there is more to education than cognitive development. Creating autonomous learners demands high levels of *intrinsic* motivation on the part of pupils and what Deci and Ryan (1985) call *honest evaluations* whereby pupils report accurately as to what they can and cannot understand.

At the moment many teachers in Hong Kong, when confronted with suggestions for using various forms of student self-assessment such as traffic lights, ratings and so forth, claim that their pupils would all give positive evaluations for fear of losing face in front of their peers. Deci & Ryan, however, in their Self Determination Theory (SDT) argue that the degrees of openness and trust required within a class to foster autonomous learning is only possible in *non-controlling, non-competitive* environments

Deci and Ryan’s non-controlling classroom is one where the rules for working and behaving are formulated by the teacher and the pupils together. There is discussion as to appropriate consequences for breaking these rules so that the use of strategies such as *circle time*, and end of lesson debriefing are very important. Rewards and sanctions (e.g. stars for good behaviour, detention for bad) are avoided. If a sanction is required it should be something positive (e.g. giving up free time to help another pupil learn). Above all, the whole class is never punished for the actions of certain individual/s whom the teacher can’t identify.

This approach challenges current practice in many Asian primary classrooms, in particular, where the award of stars and merit marks and the applause of one's fellow pupils for getting the right answer is very much a part of the local school culture.

While most of the papers provide a mix of theory and practice, some such as Mok and her colleagues' concern detailed research findings; in this case that familiarity in handling number in Primary Three is the most powerful predictor of future mathematical success. This will be news to many policy makers in the West who have long sought explanations for their relative poor performance on international evaluations in comparison with countries from East Asia. At various times this performance gap has been ascribed to better, more knowledgeable teachers, direct instruction methods and, more recently, to the alignment between the text book and the assessment. How refreshing if it turns out that early years teachers in the USA and the UK just need to devote more time to counting in tens, and doing simple 'adds' and 'take-aways'.

As usual, therefore, there is plenty to interest all manner of readers. This series continues to make a valuable contribution to the assessment debate in Hong Kong and elsewhere. It merits the widest possible readership. Long may the series continue.

References

- Clarke, S. (2008). *Active learning through formative assessment*. London: Hodder Education.
- Deci, E.L., & Ryan, R.M. (1985). *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behaviour*. New York: Plenum.
- Hattie, J. and Timperley, H. (2007). The power of feedback. *Review of Educational Research*, 77 (1): 81-112
- Mok, M. (2011). *Self-directed learning orientated assessment: Assessment that informs learning & empowers the learner*. Hong Kong: PACE Publishing Ltd.
- William, D. (2011). *Embedded formative assessment*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.