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THE USE OF PEER ASSESSMENT AND SELF-ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNER AUTONOMY

Although assessment for learning (AfL) is nothing new to mainstream education in the UK, in the world of ELT it remains a less familiar and practised approach. To understand what AfL is, it is useful to start with what it is not. Traditional approaches to assessment are generally based on assessment of learning. Assessment of learning is generally carried out by the teacher to collect information about attainment. It is usually done at the end of a course and takes the form of an exam or test which is used to assign grades and report achievement or failure. Assessment for learning, on the other hand, occurs at all stages of the learning process. Students are encouraged to take an active role, become self-regulated learners and leave school able and confident to continue learning throughout their lives. Assessment for learning is also referred to as formative assessment, i.e. the process of collecting and interpreting evidence for use by teachers and learners to decide where they are in their learning, where they need to go, and how best to get there. It is a process by which assessment information is used by teachers to adjust their teaching strategies and by students to adjust their learning strategies. AfL encourages learning and promotes motivation by emphasizing progress and achievement rather than failure [1]. AfL is now established as one of the most powerful ways of improving learning and raising standards and current research is adding further evidence in support of this claim.

The key underlying principles of AfL which are used to guide classroom practice are as follows:

➤ Communicate confidence that every learner can improve. Above all, AfL must be underpinned by the utmost confidence that every student can improve. We can help learners believe they can improve by giving specific feedback on what they need to do to and how they can do it.

➤ Empower learners to take an active part in their own learning. The AfL process can unlock the approaches used by students and help them to become more aware of what they are learning and how they are learning it. This empowers students to take control of their own learning by developing their skills of self-regulation. As they begin to assess their own work and set goals, they also become more independent.

➤ Develop learners' confidence in peer and self-assessment. These are skills that learners need time and practice in. The more they do it, the more confident and accurate they will be in their assessment [1].

To use AfL teachers can:

➤ Collect information about individual learners to better understand their needs. We can do this in a variety of ways such as finding out what they already know, noticing who answers questions, circulating and observing learners during activities, taking feedback on how interesting or difficult they found the topic or tasks, etc.

➤ Adjust our teaching in response to our observations or assessment results. A central part of teaching and learning is reflecting on how successful the lesson and learning was and judging whether the topic needs to be reviewed, or re-taught using a different approach or activity. As teachers we are constantly making judgements and decisions in response to our learners' needs.

➤ Share learning objectives with learners. Learners need to know the lesson objectives. We can write these on the board at the start of a lesson and check our learners understand them. We can then create links between these and previous objectives and refer to them during the lesson and again at the end. We can also discuss with learners why they are studying what they are studying.

➤ Share success criteria with learners. Learners need to know what ‘good work’ is and how to achieve it. Sharing or negotiating the criteria with learners helps them know what they need to do and gives them confidence in their work.

➤ Use questioning. Questioning helps us identify and correct misunderstandings and gaps in knowledge. It gives us information about what learners know, understand and can do. We use this information to plan lessons and activities that move students from where they are to where they need to go.

➤ Give specific and useful feedback. Learners need specific feedback in the form of comments rather than grades if they are to improve. Feedback should inform learners about gaps in their knowledge, understanding or skills, and how to close those gaps.

➤ Introduce peer feedback. Students learn how to give each other advice about their work using success criteria. They can discuss what has been done well, what still needs to be done, and give advice on how to achieve that improvement.

➤ Introduce self-assessment. Learner self-assessment encourages learners to take responsibility for their own learning. Learners use success criteria to identify what they have done well and what they need to focus on next. They can then set personal goals [1].

As we see, if you would like to try some AfL activities with your learners, you should introduce peer assessment and self-assessment.

Let us consider the peculiarities of peer assessment and self-assessment.

One of the ways in which students internalize the characteristics of quality work is by evaluating the work of their peers. However, if they are to offer helpful feedback, students must have a clear understanding of what they are to look for in their peers' work. The instructor must explain expectations clearly to them before they begin.

One way to make sure students understand this type of evaluation is to give students a practice session with it. The instructor provides a sample writing or speaking assignment. As a group, students determine what should be assessed and how criteria for successful completion of the communication task should be defined.

Then the instructor gives students a sample completed assignment. Students assess this using the criteria they have developed, and determine how to convey feedback clearly to the fictitious student.

Students can also benefit from using rubrics or checklists to guide their assessments. At first these can be provided by the instructor; once the students have more experience, they can develop them themselves.

For peer evaluation to work effectively, the learning environment in the classroom must be supportive. Students must feel comfortable and trust one another in order to provide honest and constructive feedback. Instructors who use group work and peer assessment frequently can help students develop trust by forming them into small groups early in the semester and having them work in the same groups throughout the term. This allows them to become more comfortable with each other and leads to better peer feedback.

It should be noted that students can become better language learners when they engage in deliberate thought about what they are learning and how they are learning it. In this kind of reflection, students step back from the learning process to think about their language learning strategies and their progress as language learners. Such self-assessment encourages students to become independent learners and can increase their motivation.

The successful use of student self-assessment depends on three key elements: goal setting, guided practice with assessment tools, and portfolios [2].

Goal setting is essential because students can evaluate their progress more clearly when they have targets against which to measure their performance. In addition, students' motivation to learn increases when they have self-defined, and therefore relevant, learning goals.

Guided practice with assessment tools. Students do not learn to monitor or assess their learning on their own; they need to be taught strategies for self-monitoring and self-assessment. Techniques for teaching students these strategies are parallel to those used for teaching learning strategies. The instructor models the technique (use of a checklist or rubric, for example); students then try the technique

themselves; finally, students discuss whether and how well the technique worked and what to do differently next time.

In addition to checklists and rubrics for specific communication tasks, students can also use broader self-assessment tools to reflect on topics they have studied, skills they have learned, their study habits, and their sense of their overall strengths and weaknesses.

Students can share their self-assessments with a peer or in a small group, with instructions that they compare their impressions with other criteria such as test scores, teacher evaluations, and peers' opinions. This kind of practice helps students to be aware of their learning. It also informs the teacher about students' thoughts on their progress, and gives the teacher feedback about course content and instruction.

Portfolios are purposeful, organized, systematic collections of student work that tell the story of a student's efforts, progress, and achievement in specific areas. The student participates in the selection of portfolio content, the development of guidelines for selection, and the definition of criteria for judging merit. Portfolio assessment is a joint process for instructor and student.

Portfolio assessment emphasizes evaluation of students' progress, processes, and performance over time. There are two basic types of portfolios:

1. A process portfolio serves the purpose of classroom-level assessment on the part of both the instructor and the student. It most often reflects formative assessment, although it may be assigned a grade at the end of the semester or academic year. It may also include summative types of assignments that were awarded grades.

2. A product portfolio is more summative in nature. It is intended for a major evaluation of some sort and is often accompanied by an oral presentation of its contents. For example, it may be used as an evaluation tool for graduation from a program or for the purpose of seeking employment.

In both types of portfolios, emphasis is placed on including a variety of tasks that elicit spontaneous as well as planned language performance for a variety of purposes and audiences, using rubrics to assess performance, and demonstrating

reflection about learning, including goal setting and peer assessment and self-assessment.

Portfolio characteristics:

- Represent an emphasis on language use and cultural understanding
- Represent a collaborative approach to assessment
- Represent a student's range of performance in reading, writing, speaking, and listening as well as cultural understanding
- Emphasize what students can do rather than what they cannot do
- Represent a student's progress over time
- Engage students in establishing ongoing learning goals and assessing their progress towards those goals
- Measure each student's achievement while allowing for individual differences between students in a class
- Address improvement, effort, and achievement
- Allow for assessment of process and product
- Link teaching and assessment to learning [2].

To sum up, a good assessment is not only an assessment of learning; it is also an assessment for learning. This kind of assessment contributes to the learners' growing consciousness, and enables them to go on with learning. In this way there is a clear connection between self-directed learning and assessment, and teachers should play role by giving up the assessment to the learners. At present, self-assessment is a valuable tool in the teacher's repertoire of techniques that enhance learning. There are a number of benefits to using self-assessment in the classroom. It allows students to map their knowledge of the language at various points within a course and/or semester. Self-assessment motivates students to look at their strengths and weaknesses and become more autonomous learners which is a fundamental part of the learning process. Moreover, making peer assessment an integral part of evaluation procedures not only encourages learners and teachers to regard assessment as a shared responsibility, it can also be applied to alter the traditional one-way teacher-centered classes to a more learner-centered one. It is obvious that peer involvement

creates opportunities for interaction, and increases objectivity in assessment. It is believed that peer assessment encourages reflective learning through observing others' performances and becoming aware of performance criteria. In general, peer assessment seems to generate positive reactions in students, although some students have concerns and worries, it leads to the development of self-awareness, noticing the gap between one's and others' perception, and facilitating further learning and responsibility for it. In addition, focusing on peers' strengths and weaknesses can enhance students' learning, raise their level of critical thinking, and lead them to autonomy.

References:

1. Assessment for Learning [Electronic resource]. / – On line – <https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/assessment-learning>
2. Peer and Self-assessment [Electronic resource]. / – On line – <http://www.nclrc.org/essentials/assessing/peereval.htm>