

Assessment Principles

Assessment is a term used across education, the trust and our schools. Like many things in education, the more the term is used, the more is attributed to it and therefore, the meaning and purpose becomes distorted from that which it was originally intended.

An Assessment Reflection

Therefore, we start the Coppice Principles with a reflection. The way that we have used this term may have added to this distortion. Our reflections are that some of the ways that we have used the term 'Assessment' have been problematic. For example, we currently have a Trust Assessment Calendar and on that calendar we have Assessment weeks. This potentially could send the message that assessment is a timetabled thing that happens when it is prescribed. The other implication is that in those assessment weeks on the assessment calendar, we ask the children to complete tests (or summative assessments). Can you see how frequently the word assessment is used! However, the tests we ask the children to do in these windows are one, very small type of assessment.

That is not to say that they are without use, but we would like to try and divorce the word 'assessment' from this window of time, to change our focus on assessment. Moving forwards, we will still ask children to complete summative tests, but we will change the vocabulary around this to be 'Summative Data Collection'.

What, then, do we mean by 'Assessment'?

Assessment provides the link between teaching and learning and is therefore one of the most powerful tools we have to accelerate learning. There can be no 'Assessment week' as every week, every day and every lesson should have high quality assessment within it. We need to be able to use assessment to gain a better understanding of what children already know, what has been fully learned, what is only partially understood and where there are still errors or misconceptions.

The biggest and most important single factor that influences learning is what the learner already knows. This is why assessment is so important.

We need to work out where our children are, rather than where we would like them to be, and then build our teaching around this.

The significant challenge with this is that children do not learn what we teach. This again highlights the importance of assessment, as it is only by assessing our children can we find out what our children have taken away from our teaching – it is the bridge between teaching and learning. This needs to be specific rather than generic as if children all learn at different rates, and from different starting points, then giving all children the same instructional experiences will almost guarantee unequal outcomes.

Summative or Formative Assessment – does it matter?

You will have heard both of these terms used a lot in relation to assessment as well. As with most things in education, there can be the risk that terms become lethally mutated or that people's understanding of the terms is different. If we think about the purpose of both types of assessment, we can perhaps view them in this way:

- the purpose of formative assessments is to improve learning
- the purpose of summative assessments is to gain a measure of attainment

What is interesting about looking at the types of assessment is that they are not as much two separate types of assessment as they are two ends along a spectrum of assessment.



Looking at assessment in this way shows that an activity in and of itself is neither summative or formative. It is about the purpose of the assessment which determines its nature. For example, an end of term test would usually be classified as 'summative' as it can lead to a measure of attainment. If, however, you did not grade the test, but instead scrutinised the outcomes at both an individual and class level, gave feedback to children on what they had done wrong and given them strategies on how to improve and altered your planning, groupings and future instruction as a result of your findings, the test has been used largely formatively. Conversely, an in lesson quiz after a hinge question would usually be classified as 'formative' as it could be used to adapt a lesson based on the findings. If, however, all you do is collect the number of correct responses to store in a markbook, then the quiz has been used largely summatively.

Throughout the principles, much of what will be shared will be around the formative use of assessment. It is therefore useful to consider a shared understanding of what we mean when we say 'formative assessment'. The quote below is adapted from Dylan Wiliam:

An assessment functions formatively to the extent that evidence about children's achievement is elicited, interpreted, and used by teachers, children or their peers in the moment (in lessons, across lessons and across units of work) to make decisions about the next steps in learning/instruction moment (in lessons, across lessons and across units of work) that are likely to be better, or better founded, than the decisions that would have been taken in the absence of that evidence.

It is important to us that the definition focuses on the evidence that assessments gives us, who can use that evidence and that there is a focus on making decisions based on the evidence.

Principle 1: Good assessment requires good evidence that leads to decisions

All assessment and instruction – our lessons – should be an intentional process. It is important that when we are thinking about our lessons, we are able to consider the implications of our short, medium and long term goals for the children in our class. This intentionality will then allow us to think carefully about how we will know that the children have learned what we have taught.

- Long term instruction and assessment – usually over the course of a term where the goals are broader but have been broken down into smaller steps which progress appropriately.
- Medium term instruction and assessment – usually over the course of a unit, with opportunities for assessment and refining of instruction planned to be within teaching units to ensure that children remain on track
- Short term instruction and assessment – usually within a lesson to ensure that instruction is adapted so that children are able to keep up.

In all of these types of assessment and instruction, the quality of the evidence that they seek to collect will be key in the decisions that they make to improve children's outcomes. Planning in the short, medium and long term should always deliberately consider how evidence will be collected. The big idea here is that better evidence collected will lead to better decisions about children's learning – and this in turn will lead to better learning for children.

To maximise the impact of both the evidence that we collect and the decisions we make, we must be aware of the curriculum and its constraints. In education, we can become beholden to curriculum timetabling and with the increased focus on all subject areas, this is understandable. However, if we are going to support the shift towards making better decisions, we need to feel able to make the curriculum fit our timetables, not our timetables fit our curriculum. For example, is during a short term assessment (in lesson) you collect evidence that suggests that a concept is partially secure for most, but the lesson is due to end, the decision you make may well be to not end the lesson and focus some extra instruction on securing the concept in the knowledge that this will be time well spent in the long run.

Principle 2: Agile teaching and learning relies on knowing more about what children know

When we look at schemes of work, or even the National Curriculum, the standards are organised in a fairly linear fashion. There are timeframes attached to these linear standards (think the Year 4 maths objectives, or the Summer term overview) and this can work against learning by making us think that teaching and learning are linear processes.

In a linear process of teaching and learning, the next steps are determined by what has already been covered and what comes next in the sequence. It is perhaps better to consider teaching and learning as an agile process – one that is subject to chance and change. By doing this, we can use

the evidence that we have collected about previous teaching and learning to determine what should happen next.

We already know that children don't always learn what we teach. We also know from Graham Nuthall's research (who collated evidence from classroom over a period of many years) that 'children are likely to know 40-50% of what the teacher is about to teach them, but what each child knows is likely to be a different 40-50%'. This is why assessment is so key to the teaching and learning process. We need agility to be able to ascertain starting points, think forwards to plan possible routes for both individual and series of lessons and to make changes as we uncover more and more about what children have (or have not) learned.

Principle 3: Know the destination and the signposts – and use assessment to guide your children



Imagine being at the foot of a mountain with the challenge of finding a way to the top. On one side of the mountain, there does not seem to be a pathway to the top. Although you can see the destination, there is a long way between you (at the bottom) and where you want to get to. On

the other side of the mountain, there is a pathway and at various points along the path, there are signposts, making sure that you can stay on track.

Think of this analogy as the importance of Learning Intentions and Success Criteria – both in the shorter term (lesson by lesson) and in the longer term (across a topic). We need to focus on our children knowing the answers to three key questions:

- What am I learning (learning intention)
- Why am I learning it (relevance)
- How will I know I have learned it (success criteria)

Learning Intentions invite children into their learning. How and when teachers share the learning intention with their children can vary; what is important is that at some point, the children should know what we are intending for them to learn. Without well thought out learning intentions, there is a risk that children complete tasks which can lead to assessments becoming divorced from the learning as it is not clear from the outset what was expected from them.

Success criteria are valuable because they should identify the evidence necessary for children to produce to show that they have done what is needed to achieve the learning intention. We need to remember that we cannot judge learning in the lesson alone because we won't know whether a child has learned something until some time after the lesson. However, the success criteria can still tell us, and the children, if they are on the right track.

Think back to the analogy of climbing the mountain. Learning intentions and success criteria can help make the path clearer, but it is our assessment and feedback which help to keep our children on the path.

Principle 4: Effective assessment requires knowing what ALL children know

At Coppice and within your schools, children are at the heart of every decision that is made. Every child in every class belongs and matters. If we are, then, to make effective decisions about the teaching and learning, we must be collecting evidence from all children in the classroom, not just the ones who are eager to share their thoughts. This is where there is a strong link between our assessment principles, particularly Principle 2. To collect evidence from all children demands an agile pedagogy which encourages engagement and responsiveness. We need to be gathering high-quality evidence from every child in the class and using that to make better decisions in our classrooms.

The terminology around this principle varies depending on where you read it: Check for Understanding, CFU, universal response. However, there are two key takeaways here:

- we need to hear/see from all children in our class

- we need to use the evidence to make decisions about what to do next

As was discussed in the introduction, CFU should be a formative type of assessment, but becomes summative if no decisions are made with the information. It is not simply enough to ask children to complete a CFU task. We need to be looking at the responses of all children, considering the feedback we need to give and the future path of our lesson or lessons.

There is a concern raised that CFU tasks can take time and potentially slow the pace of learning. However, evidence suggests that they can, in fact, quicken the pace of learning through increased opportunities to answer questions. By increasing the interactions between the teacher and all of the children increases the amount of on task time as the children are frequently re-engaged. In addition, gathering the evidence of what children know can help better shape the lesson, meaning that it may be able to move through the lesson at a different pace.

Principle 5: You create the weather – create the right conditions in your classroom for assessment to thrive

As we discussed in the introduction, the term ‘assessment’ has potentially gained some negativity both for teachers and for children. Too often, it can be seen as a high stakes test, or lots to mark. However, through these principles we hope that we can create a shift where assessment becomes the servant – not the master – of learning.

To do this well, we need to make sure that the climate is right in our classrooms. Both children and teachers need to feel and see the benefit of ongoing assessment. To help to understand this principle, there are some important things to consider:

- Engage children in the assessment process – evidence has shown that children who take ownership of their learning are more engaged in their own assessment. Self and peer assessment give children the opportunity to be involved in their own learning and assessment. Self assessment in particular can be challenging for children because it is both cognitively demanding and emotionally challenging – even as adults we are not great at marking our own work! Peer assessment can support this, but it is important that children are taught the process of how to assess.
- Teach the assessment process – how do we move beyond self and peer assessment being examples of global praise (great job) or small edits not specifically linked to learning intentions (misspelled words underlined). It is unsurprising to know that “responders are taught, not born”. Children will need to be taught how to peer and self assess effectively. To support this, being clear on your learning intentions and success criteria is important, and creating rubrics or clear criteria for the children to use when peer and self assessing will have significant gains. Within this, it is also important to model and teach that assessment is a non-threatening

experience conducted in a non-judgemental environment and one which helps them to improve.

- *Make assessment relevant* – children need to understand the relevance in their learning and it is up to us to provide it. We need to be looking to use assessment to promote relevance and spark learning by providing children with opportunities to apply what they know and have learned using techniques that are authentic. We could look at this in a more simple way: if we want to know how well a child can do something, we need to have them do the thing we are interested in! We also want to be confident that children can do more than just mirror back what we have taught them. We want to know if they can apply the knowledge and skills in a different context.

There are many ways to make assessments relevant; provide an audience, present to a panel, debates, galleries ... the list could go on and this is where your pedagogy is key. Keep in mind two essential questions – what do we really want to know? Where's the evidence coming from? A warning about relevance – it is far more than being familiar; it has to be authentic. To highlight this, read the following: 'Maths – the only place where people buy sixty watermelons and no-one asks why!'. Simply adding something familiar doesn't make it happen. Instead, the focus has to be on the evidence you need to collect to give you the best understanding of all children that helps them to improve.