

The four pillars of assessment

Assessment and feedback

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What's the idea?

Effective assessments can be powerful tools for enhancing learning and raising attainment. To realise this, we must consciously plan assessments with purpose, reliability, validity and value in mind. This guide offers practical ways for teachers and leaders to apply these principles to make assessment more meaningful.

What does the research say?

Evidence Based Education (2018) proposes "Four Pillars of Assessment" which should be considered as part of assessment design and implementation:

- Purpose: What function do we want this assessment to serve? Has it been planned in a way which elicits the highest-quality information possible towards the intended end use?
- Validity: To what extent does this assessment measure what we intended it to? How relevant and appropriate are the inferences made from the assessment outcomes, towards our purpose?
- Reliability: How precise and consistent are the measurements we generate from this assessment? How precise and consistent are the inferences we make from these?
- Value: Is the outlay of time and resources (for both pupil and teacher)

justified in relation to the quality of information gained from this assessment? Is it being used to improve pupil learning and progress?

Christodoulou (2016) reasons that whilst it is not impossible to use assessments for dual purposes (such as making both formative and summative inferences), doing so can dilute the validity, reliability and value of both.

Finally, when assessing to make judgements about pupil progress through the curriculum, we must ensure assessments are designed to measure learning (relatively permanent changes to long-term memory) rather than performance (temporary variations in knowledge and skills that are observed shortly after acquisition) (Soderstrom and Bjork, 2015).

How does it work in practice?

The use of multiple-choice questions as a form of formative, diagnostic assessment has increased the speed and objectivity with which we can gather meaningful, actionable information about specific topics and concepts within the classroom. They have been powerful in targeting common misconceptions and increasing the time available for subsequent responsive teaching.

Exploring approaches such as Comparative Judgement in subjects with extended writing or subjective marking matrices (such as English and Art) has

increased the reliability and validity of formative inferences made, facilitated collaborative moderation and reduced teacher workload. You can find out more here: www.nomoremarking.com

Reducing the frequency of assessment points for summative purposes (for example half termly to termly) and designing assessments which test cumulative content from throughout the curriculum (rather than recently completed topic content) has generated more valid and reliable information about pupil learning, misconceptions and progress through the curriculum. This has also created more space for more frequent, low-stake formative assessment to the same end.

After assessments for summative purposes we evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the assessment design based on pupil responses. For example, reflections on how variables such as the level of literacy required to access a question may impact outcomes, aside from levels of pupil knowledge or skill. We then adapt and refine our assessments to strengthen the likelihood of pupil responses being indicative of their learning.

Finally, engaging in explicit assessment CPD has been key to identifying the strengths and weaknesses in approach to assessment from classroom level or whole-school assessment frameworks.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

- Christodoulou D (2016) Making Good Progress? The Future of Assessment for Learning. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Evidence Based Education (2018) The four pillars of assessment: A resource guide. Available at: <https://evidencebased.education> (accessed 19 January 2021).
- Evidence Based Education (2021) The Assessment Lead Programme. Available at: <https://evidencebased.education/assessment-lead-programme/> (accessed 19 January 2021).
- Soderstrom NC and Bjork RA (2015) Learning versus performance: An integrative review. Perspectives on Psychological Science 10(2): 176–199.

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