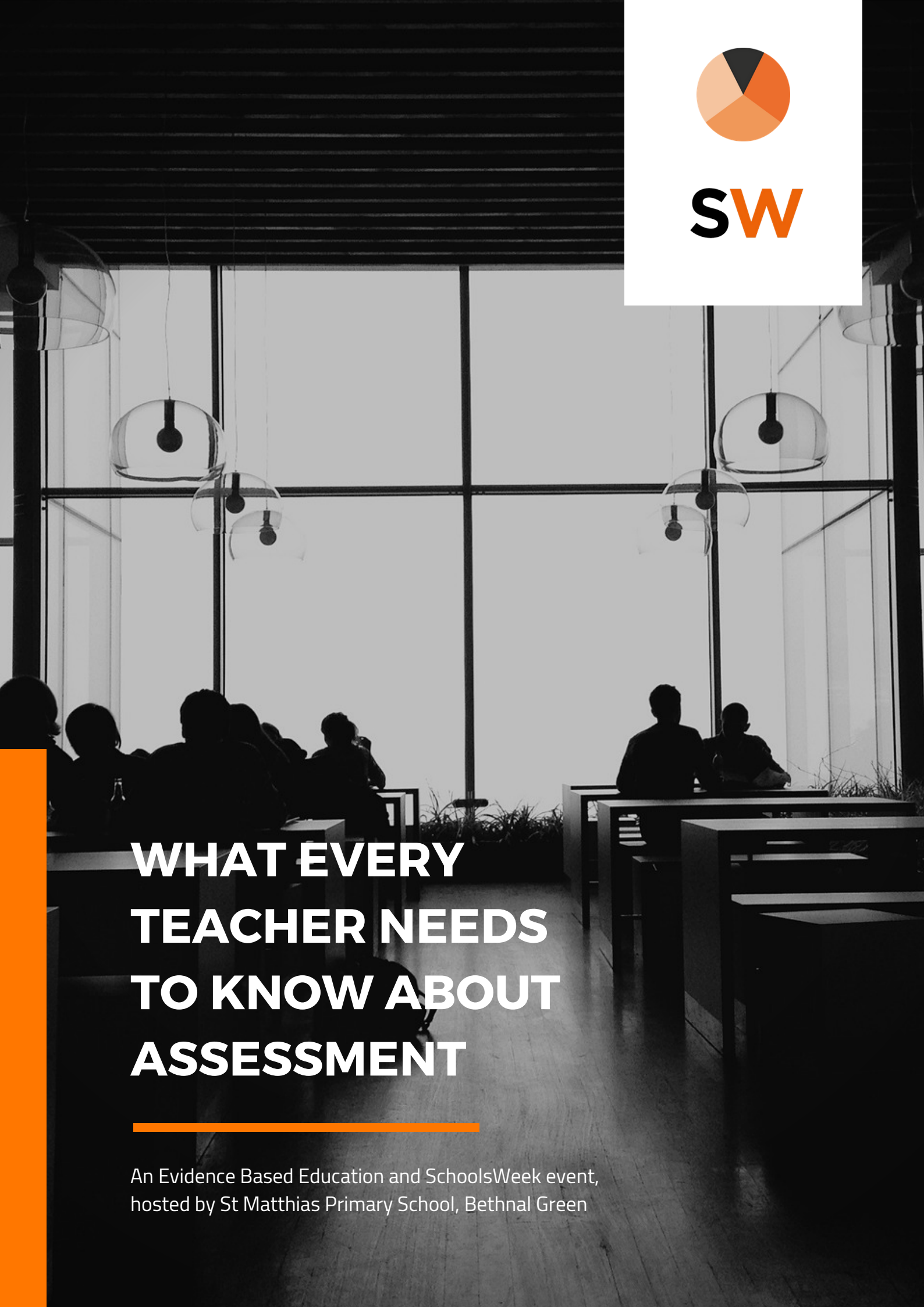

WHAT EVERY TEACHER NEEDS TO KNOW ABOUT ASSESSMENT

An Evidence Based Education and SchoolsWeek event, hosted by St Matthias Primary School, Bethnal Green

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are indebted to the following people and organisations for their time, support and participation, without which this event would not have been possible:

- Amie Barr and Ark
- Prof. Becky Allen and UCL Institute of Education
- Phil Stock and Greenshaw High School
- Clare Sealy and St Matthias School
- Jon Hutchinson and Reach Academy Feltham
- Dr. Christine Harrison and King's College London

Thank you to the Festival of Education for providing food, wine and soft drinks for the lucky few who could attend the event.

Extra thanks must go to Clare Sealy and the staff at St Matthias for hosting the event.

Finally, to everyone who came along on the day, tuned in to the live stream or downloaded this booklet – thank you for being interested in assessment and how we can maximise its use as a more purposeful tool for learning!

From the SchoolsWeek and Evidence Based Education teams

FOREWORD

Professor Stuart Kime is Director of Education at Evidence Based Education (EBE). A qualified teacher and former school leader, Stuart spent ten years teaching English and Drama in secondary schools, as well as the odd Classics lesson. His interest in research focuses on assessment, teachers' professional learning, and evaluation. At EBE, he is responsible for the design and delivery of all online and blended learning programmes, including the online Assessment Lead Programme.

Stuart is the author of the EEF's Assessing and Monitoring Pupil Progress Guide, and co-author of the EEF's DIY Evaluation Guide. He also wrote the National Toolkit of Common Evaluation Standards for Policing in the UK. Stuart is a Visiting International Professor in the Hector Research Institute for Education Sciences and Psychology at the Eberhard Karls University, Tübingen, and an Honorary Professor in the School of Education at Durham University. Stuart formerly held a Policy Fellow post in the UK Government's Department for Education.

Teachers make a difference; they are the most valuable resource in any education system, the most powerful lever of positive change available in any school. But effective teaching requires effective training and ongoing professional development in assessment, two things that the English education system has yet to achieve at scale.

"COULD WE HELP REDUCE UNNECESSARY WORKLOAD AND INCREASE TEACHERS' EFFECTIVENESS?"

Each year, around 30,000 new teachers enter the profession in England, joining some 450,000 FTE colleagues in approximately 24,000 schools. Every single day, those teachers see the sands of time and opportunity pass unrelentingly for their own students' learning, and they respond to this positively, urgently, and decisively, doing everything in their power to have a positive impact. But could they be even more effective if they had an even better understanding of assessment? What would they feel confident to stop doing if they had a strong underpinning theory of assessment? Could we help reduce unnecessary workload and increase teachers' effectiveness?

We wanted to answer these questions, so in 2017, Evidence Based Education launched the Assessment Lead Programme.

We wanted to help an ITT system that broadly does a good job, but which needed to improve its training on assessment, specifically in specialist concepts such as validity, reliability and bias (Carter Review, 2015). We wanted to help teachers at all stages of their careers by responding to a growing disquiet in the profession about the effectiveness and expense of common approaches to CPD (Developing Great Teaching, 2015). And we wanted to do this in a way that didn't mean teachers had to be away from their classes, or for schools to be levied huge financial expense in return.

The Assessment Lead Programme has been a huge success; in just one year, hundreds of schools have begun to develop assessment practices and policies which are fit for purpose and based on the best available evidence. Schools like Falinge Park High School in Rochdale, and Whitehill Junior School in Hitchin. In January 2019, ALP will be complemented by Assessment Essentials, a ten-week, low-cost, online, evidence-based professional learning programme for classroom teachers who want to improve their assessment practice.

In the pages that follow, our panellists for the #EveryTeacher event speak clearly about what teachers need to know about assessment, and about what they should do more (and less) of. Their voices join those of Prof Dame Alison Peacock, Sir David Carter, Stephen Munday, Prof Rob Coe, and the thousands upon thousands of teachers who simply want to do the best they can to improve students' outcomes.

Let this #EveryTeacher event be a landmark, a time we look back on in years to come as a tipping point. We know what the problem is, and we have the means to address it affordably, effectively and at scale.

So what are we waiting for?

MEET THE PANEL

BECKY ALLEN

Professor of Education, UCL Institute of Education

Becky is Professor of Education at the UCL Institute of Education. An economist by training and former secondary school teacher, she is an expert in the analysis of large datasets. Her research explores how schools respond to changes in government policy. Between 2014 and 2017, she founded and led Education Datalab. In 2017, she co-founded Teacher Tapp, which is already the largest teacher survey in the UK. Her book on teacher careers, 'The Teacher Gap', was published last year.

@profbeckyallen

PHIL STOCK

Deputy Head, Greenshaw High School

Phil Stock is Deputy Headteacher at Greenshaw High School, where he leads on Teaching & Learning and Assessment. He also writes about English teaching and education in general, at joeybagstock.wordpress.com

@joeybagstock

CLARE SEALY

Headteacher, St Matthias Primary School

Clare Sealy is the headteacher of St Matthias Primary School in Tower Hamlets in the East End of London where she has been working since 1991. She is interested in the application of cognitive science in the primary and early years classroom; what it tells us about memory and how this could influence how we plan for long term learning through careful curriculum design. She writes blogs about how her school is attempting to put educational research into practice.

@ClareSealy

JON HUTCHINSON

Foundation Curriculum Lead, Reach Academy Feltham

Jon graduated with First Class Honours in Philosophy from Heythrop College, University of London, before training through the Teach First programme and teaching in north-east London for two years. Jon is fascinated by educational theory and research, and has recently completed his Masters of Education with the University of Cambridge whilst teaching at Reach.

@jon_hutchinson_

CHRISTINE HARRISON

Reader in Science Education, King's College London

Christine worked in secondary schools for 13 years before joining King's to run the Biology Education section. Her teaching and research have centred on assessment, science education, cognitive acceleration and the use of text and TV in classrooms, and in 1998, she began work on the King's-Medway-Oxfordshire-Formative Assessment project (KMOFAP). Search the EBE blog for more information on KMOFAP, as well as insights on the project from both Chris and one of the teachers involved.

@ASEChairChris

AMIE BARR

Head of Assessment, Ark

Amie Barr is Head of Assessment for Ark, the high-achieving network of 38 schools in London, Birmingham, Portsmouth and Hastings. Prior to joining Ark, Amie was a senior leader working at a secondary academy in the Harris Federation. She started her career as a maths teacher, after earning her PGCE from Oxford University in 2006. Amie is working on several programmes within Ark, including a SSIF project in Hastings working to improve the quality of teaching and learning of mathematics across the region. She has a particular interest in formative assessment and the use of summative assessments at Key Stage 3.

@AmieBarr17

DISCUSSION ONE

WHAT DOES #EVERYTEACHER NEED TO KNOW ABOUT ASSESSMENT?

BECKY ALLEN

Beyond the high-level principles of reliability and validity that help teachers understand how to think about what an assessment does and doesn't tell them, I don't think we can say much about what every teacher needs to know.

The job of a teacher is rather diverse depending on whether you teach 4 year olds or 19 year olds, whether you teach art or maths, and whether you spend 30 minutes or 30 hours a week with a student. The age of the child affects the type of assessment tools you need to become an expert in. The knowledge domain of the subject affects both choice of assessments and the types of inferences it is typically possible to make. The number of hours you spend with a student each week affects how important it is to create formal documentation of their capabilities in your subject, rather than simply hold judgements in your head.

That said, in recent years almost all teachers have been subjected to the use of 'assessment' as a control device to assert whether or not they are good at doing their job. In most cases, the inferences that line managers make from assessments are largely unwarranted. So, I'd argue that becoming an expert in assessment yourself is your best weapon to defend yourself from managers who are erroneously using assessment data during performance management meetings!

PHIL STOCK

There are a number of things about assessment that it would be good for every teacher to know, regardless of their role or responsibility. All teachers, for instance, should definitely know that assessments can serve as powerful learning events through the process of retrieval.

At a more basic level, it would be helpful for teachers to understand the nature of assessment - that it is essentially a procedure for generating inferences about things we want to know, such as how much students have learned. Similarly, understanding that assessments only really provide an approximation of we want to know might make us more cautious in claims we make and actions we take from results.

All teachers would also benefit from a grasp of key assessment concepts like validity, reliability, standardisation and measurement error. An appreciation of these things would encourage teachers to better align their assessments with what they have taught, and to check their questions are assessing the things that they should be assessing in a fair and consistent manner.

Perhaps the most practical thing for teachers to know about assessment would be how to write good multiple choice questions, and when and how to use them for formative purposes. If every teacher knew how to write brilliant hinge questions that targeted common misconceptions, misunderstandings might be able to be addressed before they take hold and lead to more confusion further down the line.

> **"IF EVERY TEACHER KNEW HOW TO WRITE BRILLIANT HINGE QUESTIONS, MISUNDERSTANDINGS MIGHT BE ABLE TO BE ADDRESSED BEFORE THEY TAKE HOLD...**

CLARE SEALY

Teachers need to know that the term 'assessment' has been so misunderstood and misused by the profession, that it should probably be put out to pasture for a few years. Instead, teachers need to know lots about responsive teaching, a fair bit about benchmarking (including comparative judgement) and only a tiny bit about tests and exams.

Because of its relative importance, I am going to focus on the responsive teaching aspect. Teachers need to understand this isn't about performing specific techniques as a kind of magic ritual. Rather it is as simple and as hard as really knowing what it is your children know well and what it is they don't yet know well, and adapting your teaching accordingly. This is challenging for two main reasons: the logistical challenge and because it requires really good subject knowledge.

The logistical challenge should not be underestimated; teachers need to know that this is hard but important. Graham Nuthall described how, in many lessons, children already know half of what is being taught. The problem is, they each know a different half! What is more, knowledge is not a stable entity. What's known one day may not be the next day, let alone the next week or next month. Teachers need to plan for this and build in time to methodically revisit and refresh previous learning, and know that, as a result, they will cover less in the short term but children will learn more in the long term.

The other challenge – subject knowledge – involves teachers appreciating that they may suffer from 'the curse of knowledge.' As experts, able to do things automatically, they have forgotten that automaticity is built up from many tiny steps, with novices needing to learn each one individually. So it's not just that we need to check where children are and adjust our teaching accordingly; it's also that our 'map' of where they are needs to be at a much bigger scale than we probably realise.

For some subject areas, particularly some foundation subjects in primary schools, the opposite is true. Teachers may suffer from the curse of ignorance! Unless you really know what you are teaching, you are highly unlikely to be able to give children the responsive teaching they need as you will not know what the likely misconceptions are or how to further challenge or enrich children who grasp what you are teaching easily.

CHRISTINE HARRISON

It's not just knowledge, but more what do teachers need to understand and adapt to their context to make assessment work productively. Most of the teachers I have met, and especially the ones I have been fortunate enough to work with, treat assessment as an add-on - either something you do to check learning or something that is one of the expected rituals of the classroom.

In high-stakes testing cultures, this add-on idea gets morphed into a monster, with test marks having a huge influence on what is taught, how it is taught, what learners believe teachers value and stress. In other words, the validity of the assessment becomes compromised.

Teachers need to reclaim assessment and put it to work as the servant of the curriculum and of pedagogy so that assessment works for learning.

I think we need to go back to principles, and let's start with some basic meanings. Assessment is a process of collecting evidence and using it to make inferences about what students know and can do. We can then make use of this evidence to make judgements and provide guidance for the next steps in learning.

Secondly, there are many ways of collecting this evidence. Let's imagine we were trying to find out who can make a good cup of tea. So, you could have a written test where students write steps in order, OR you could make it an authentic task and you could observe and judge what you see students doing, possibly against criteria/rubrics… OR you could just taste the products.

Thirdly, there are pros and cons for all three of these methods. The important task for the teacher is making a decision about which of these is most helpful for those learners - at that particular point in their learning journey. From the evidence collected for each of these assessment methods, teachers need to decide where is the best feedback for them, in terms of planning future learning, and where is the best feedback for the learners about how they are doing and what they might need to do next.

AMIE BARR

Assessment is not a discrete event. Strong teachers formatively assess what students know continually throughout every lesson, they do not wait for the outcomes of summative tests at the end of a term or year (or at any other point) to discover what progress their students are making.

Whereas formative assessment is an embedded practice, summative assessment should simply confirm and quantify what we already know about students' attainment and progress.

Strong formative assessment supports us in progressing student learning as well as measuring it. Teacher training generally introduces a range of formative assessment techniques for teachers to use in lessons. However, strong formative assessment is not the technique used but rather the formulation of the question asked, the responses students give and the teachers' understanding of what to do with those responses to progress learning. Before we decide on the technique we want to use, we must decide on the purpose of our assessment task. Once we have a clear purpose, we can develop the appropriate content and select the appropriate type of question and therefore technique to gather responses.

The most important thing about formative assessment is that teachers must feel confident and unrestrained to change the course of a lesson or series of lessons by adapting plans as a result of student responses. Every time we pose a question, we must look and listen to what students have understood rather than simply seeking a correct answer so we can move on. The best thing about formative assessment is that it should take minimal teacher time outside of lessons. Most of the assessment has been done during the lessons.

Nevertheless, if, for example, teachers wish to review an exit ticket, it can be effective simply to read students' responses and put them into groups based on whether they have understood the content at an appropriate level or not. This leaves teachers time to use the information gained to plan the next lesson and improve student learning. Giving time-consuming written feedback may not be the most effective form of feedback.

> **"EVERY TIME WE POSE A QUESTION, WE MUST LOOK AND LISTEN TO WHAT STUDENTS HAVE UNDERSTOOD RATHER THAN SIMPLY SEEKING A CORRECT ANSWER SO WE CAN MOVE ON... THE BEST THING ABOUT FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT IS THAT IT SHOULD TAKE MINIMAL TEACHER TIME OUTSIDE OF LESSONS**

Summative assessments are, however, still a valuable tool in our education system. They attempt to provide a measure of how a student is attaining in relation to his or her peers and therefore a measure of how well the student is progressing over a long period of time. Summative assessments can only do this as well as their design and as broadly as the data set obtained. Even then, results are only valid under the assumption that all students sitting the assessment have been taught the same content (or at least the same proportion of the content).

Designing a high-quality summative assessment is very challenging. In an ideal world it would cover the entire domain a student has learnt so far, be unpredictable in the style and nature of questions and be unseen by both students and teachers in advance of the assessment. Self-evidently, these are unrealistic expectations.

However, for an assessment to be valid, the content must reflect the knowledge students have learnt in their lessons. Other influencing factors, such as literacy or numeracy levels that one does not want to test, must be minimised and there must be questions with a range of difficulty in order to differentiate between students.

Summative assessments can have an undesirable effect on the curriculum. We must ensure that they do not narrow the domain by focusing too heavily on particular areas or by being too predictable in the way we ask questions on a particular topic. Inferences around what students do and do not know can sometimes be made from a summative assessment but this in itself is challenging and requires teachers to look at not just the data but to link it to students' work to diagnose exactly what misconceptions students have.

JON HUTCHINSON

The more that I learn about assessment theory, the more full of doubts I am. In his Meditations on First Philosophy, Descartes embarked on a process of radical doubt, seeking an unshakeable foundation on which to rebuild an edifice of knowledge.

Whilst I cannot offer that, the foundations offered below are, I hope, a good starting point for teachers.

"One of the painful things about our time is that those who feel certainty are stupid, and those with any imagination and understanding are filled with doubt and indecision."

Bertrand Russell

When it comes to formative assessment, which I want to focus on here, teachers are often given lots of really practical strategies. That's important, because time is short and if we want to have an impact in the classroom then we need to know "what I can do tomorrow morning". **These off-the-shelf strategies are also, however, where things can go very wrong.** Using lollipop sticks to choose who you will ask a question to because "that's your AfL" profoundly misunderstands the principles that underpin effective formative assessment.

Cognitive Load Theory (CLT)**:** First up is the theory that Dylan Wiliam believes every teacher should know. CLT explains how we process, retrieve and store information – the very business of teachers. It is what is called a threshold concept – once you know it, you see the whole world differently.

The Forgetting Curve: Many will be familiar with Ebbinghaus's curve, and how we all forget things over time, unless we revisit it. Yet few consider the implications. Forgetting is a natural, perhaps even necessary, part of learning. Our job is to manage the retrieval by revisiting key topics.

Retrieval Strength and Storage Strength: This leads us neatly to what I have found to be the most powerful theoretical aspect of learning. Information stored in our brains has a retrieval strength (how easily it can be recalled) and storage strength (how robust and connected it is). The interplay between these two is a fascinating, complex juggling act, with the teacher as the ringmaster.

Learning and Performance: Few would argue against the proposition that learning is the core purpose of schools and education. Yet, that simple term is fairly unexamined. What do we mean by learning? If we agree with Kirschner, Swelling and Clark, that it is a change in long-term memory, then we are confronted with the uncomfortable fact that this is almost impossible to observe. Instead, what we see in the classroom is performance, which may or may not translate into that long-term learning.

"IF WE AGREE THAT [LEARNING] IS A CHANGE IN LONG-TERM MEMORY, THEN WE ARE CONFRONTED WITH THE UNCOMFORTABLE FACT THAT IT IS ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE TO OBSERVE..."

Validity and Reliability: Any undergraduate course looking at making any kind of assessment or research will begin, day one, with a discussion on validity and reliability. Are you measuring what you want to measure? Are you likely to get the same results again? What inferences can you draw from the results? It is simply not possible to discuss assessment in a mature manner without this understanding, and regrettable that few teachers possess it.

Generic Skills and Deliberate Practice: Everyone is interested in students becoming creative, critical problem-solvers. But whether these skills can be directly taught, and indeed assessed, is contended. In fact, cognitive science teaches us that many skills are highly domain-specific, and thus not transferable in the way that we hope they could be.

DISCUSSION TWO

WHAT ASSESSMENT PRACTICES SHOULD SCHOOLS DO MORE OF? AND **WHAT SHOULD THEY DO LESS OF**?

CLARE SEALY

Schools need to do a lot more assessment at a detailed, granular level, finding out the key thing that children can and can't yet do. However, this doesn't mean creating unwieldy databases containing every single objective in the National Curriculum.

It is more about deciding: what are the things that really make a difference to learning? What are the fundamentals without which children will be hindered in developing more sophisticated thinking? For example, phonics, reading fluency, volume of independent reading, handwriting, number bonds, times tables, understanding of place value, how to identify a sentence, using coordinating and subordinating conjunctions to connect sentences.

Less frequently, schools need to make some sort of judgement about the sophistication each child has in orchestrating these basic skills into some more complex tasks. This judgement will need to be comparative rather than absolute. Instead of kidding ourselves that accurate measurement in such matters is a realistic or desirable goal, we should compare and rank work and have discussions as professionals about why we think a particular piece of work is better than another, without reducing this to a checklist of features. The purpose of this is not measurement but analysis. What is it that weaker pieces are missing and how can we help children incorporate these?

It's not just about doing things in house. Some sort of occasional benchmarking process gives schools a reality check about how well the school is doing in comparison with other schools. Comparative judgment can form part of this in writing. Standardised tests can help us do this in maths, although where such tests are useless is they do not test what has been taught. This sort of mismatch between the test and the curriculum is really common when schools buy 'off the shelf' tests, particularly within the school year.

"[SCHOOLS SHOULD STOP] BELIEVING THAT BECAUSE A CHILD COULD DO SOMETHING ONCE IN A TEST, THEY CAN DO IT FOREVER."

What should we stop doing? Anything that has no impact on learning. Marking, of course. Anything that purports to 'measure' progress. Anything that averages results of different children together. Anything that simplifies rich but unwieldy, complex data into a neat chart with coloured boxes because it gives the illusion of rigour. Reading comprehension tests – as these are a test of general knowledge rather than of reading. Tests that don't reflect the curriculum.

Mammoth checklists of objectives. Believing that because a child could do something once in a particular test, they can do it forever. That whole panoply of assessment that most schools do – stop doing that. Stop being led by accountability. Start being driven by what impacts on children learning more effectively. Describe that to those you report to. It may be messy but it's real.

BECKY ALLEN

Schools frequently centrally collate data from assessments that are not designed to tell them any of things they would like to know. It is understandable that senior leadership want to know whether a cohort is on-track in each subject and where there are teachers who are struggling to teach the curriculum. However, the data they request can rarely tell them that.

Teacher judgements of whether a child can execute a particular part of the curriculum do not provide objective information about standards, unless the teacher has some framework for moderating their perspectives against some external benchmark. School test papers that have been written by a subject department do little more than provide a ranking of the students in their school from the worst to the best. This doesn't allow us to find out whether the cohort as a whole has learnt as much as we would like them to.

My sense is that in too many schools, control over assessment has passed from the teacher up to the senior leadership team to serve their longer-term perspectives on the health of their school. We actually have relatively little evidence to demonstrate that headteachers can use assessment information well for the process of school improvement. I think we should worry less about its role in school improvement and concentrate more on its role in helping students learn.

"WE SHOULD WORRY LESS ABOUT ITS [ASSESSMENT'S] ROLE IN SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT, AND CONCENTRATE MORE ON ITS ROLE IN HELPING STUDENTS LEARN."

There is overwhelming evidence for the value of testing in the learning process. For example, we know the act of retrieval aids later retention. Testing produces better organisation of knowledge, which means it can even facilitate the retrieval of material that was not tested. We also know it encourages students to study and improves metacognitive monitoring. All this points the way to placing a greater emphasis on frequent, short, low-stakes tests, and demoting the importance of a termly summative exam.

JON HUTCHINSON

Over the last five or six years I've taught children of all ages across primary and secondary, and so have been afforded the benefit of making pretty much every mistake that you can imagine when it comes to assessment.

When I first started teaching, it was commonplace for schools to do six 'data drops', hastily compiling spreadsheet after spreadsheet with coloured cells relating to hopelessly vague descriptors. Thankfully, this sort of practice is now being challenged and schools are coming to understand the unintended negative consequences of frantically shovelling more data onto the compost heap of assessment.

Formative assessment, too, was in the throes of an existential crisis when I was first teaching. There were whispers that maybe, just maybe, giving all of the children coloured cups to shuffle during a lesson wasn't quite having the impact that we wanted, and may have been pretty flawed in giving either us, or them, useful information that could be acted upon to move learning forward.

Dylan Wiliam has recently said that he wished he'd called AfL 'responsive teaching', giving an insight into how he thinks formative assessment should really look in the classroom.

At its simplest we can probably break it down into four steps:

1. Set a clear learning goal.
2. Give pupils a chance to put that learning into practice.
3. Check to see how pupils performed on the task.
4. Respond to this information.

Broadly speaking, teachers should design assessment tasks in lessons that ensure all four of these steps. Formative assessment should not be constructed to try and prove learning, but rather to reveal misconceptions. Here are three techniques that I've found helpful in that respect:

Show call: After setting the pupils a task, with a clear learning goal, circulate the room and find an example which includes a key misconception. Place this example under a visualiser to show the rest of the class. Can they spot the mistake? Can they correct it? Have they made the same mistake? Can they rectify it in their own work?

Multiple choice questions: These can be used at any point in the lesson. Write a question that focuses on the key learning point, with a number of possible answers. The wrong answers should be plausible, and link to key misconceptions. Have the children indicate the answer using their whiteboards, or fingers, or response cards. This gives an overview of how many children have not understood, and which misconception they have fallen prey to, which can be immediately addressed.

Hinge questions: It's got to that point in the lesson when you are ready to set the pupils free to independently apply the learning. But will they be successful? Before you start independent work, give everyone a 'hinge question' – a short task that focuses on the key learning objective – and check to see how many are ready to set off independently. Less than 50%? Reteach the whole class. More than 90%? Just grab the kids who got it wrong to do some more guided practice whilst everyone else gets started.

> **"FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT SHOULD NOT BE CONSTRUCTED TO TRY AND PROVE LEARNING, BUT RATHER TO REVEAL MISCONCEPTIONS.**

PHIL STOCK

Most schools would probably benefit from doing less summative assessment but of a higher quality. Regular termly, or worse, half-termly assessment takes a lot of time and effort and is one of the main contributors to excessive workload.

Aside from the burden of producing and marking that such frequent assessment brings, often the information produced is pretty useless. It is either inaccurate, or coming so thick and fast that it is impossible to act upon in any meaningful way.

Schools should think carefully about when they need to assess students for summative purposes, and design assessment programmes that balance these aims against the impact on teachers' time. Having fewer summative assessment points would make it possible to focus on improving their quality. If assessments were regularly reviewed through the lens of reliability and validity, inferences could be more accurate and therefore much more useful for teachers, leaders, parents and students.

Rather than spending so much time and energy on unnecessary summative assessments, school resources would be better directed towards developing formative assessment practice. Whether through forms of professional collaboration like Dylan Wiliam's Teacher Learning Communities, or by putting in place something more systematic, students would benefit much more if their teachers knew how to gather formative data quickly and how to respond to it effectively when it matters most.

CHRISTINE HARRISON

If assessment is going to support learning, it needs to take place alongside and intertwined with the learning and achievement, and progress should be obvious outcomes most of the time. Thus, there is less need for formal tests.

Tests or tailored assessment tasks can be used to quickly collect evidence of learning. If a child changes school or course, or has missed some of the learning activities - or perhaps has not completed all the activities, or has had variable success during the topic - tests would be used as a backstop to be clearer on where they are before they move on.

Assessment for learning, where the evidence collected is used formatively, needs to be kept in the foreground. Assessment of learning, where we collect together our judgements on the evidence for reporting, selecting and accountability, needs to be in the background. While there might be times when assessment for summative purposes edges forward, such as near GCSE, it is key that teachers still keep formative front of stage.

AMIE BARR

We must place less emphasis on summative assessments in order to understand student progress and instead focus on regular formative assessment. It is important that we do not teach to test outcomes but instead focus on teaching our subjects well and with depth.

To achieve this we need to spend more time training teachers not on what tools to use for formative assessment but on how to decide what questions to ask and how to interpret and act on student responses. We need to use our questioning to get to the bottom of what students understand and why so that we can address misconceptions and deepen learning.

Marking every piece of work in a student's exercise books is both time consuming and often ineffective in improving that student's learning. If teachers are going to mark exercise books, they should consider marking specific tasks. These tasks should be designed to ensure they draw out the knowledge and skills teachers wants to check. When we are giving feedback on pieces of work, we must build in time for students to respond to that feedback formally as part of a lesson, redrafting or revisiting topics to improve the quality of their work. This feedback needs to take place quickly whilst students are still developing their understanding of a given topic. Feeding back on students' work live in a lesson is perhaps the most valuable form of feedback. Live feedback may not be written and we need to value this as much as, if not more than, the written feedback students receive.

"WE SHOULD NOT TRY TO MAKE FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT SUMMATIVE. AN IMPORTANT ASPECT OF FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT IS THAT THE STAKES ARE LOW."

Outside summative assessment, we should move away from talking about grades as much as possible. We should instead talk more to students about what they do and do not understand and what they need to do next in their learning journey. This conversation is not about criteria referencing but about discussing students' individual strengths and areas for development.

We should not try to make formative assessment summative. An important aspect of formative assessment is that the stakes are low. As soon as we try to record formative inferences formally or use them to create teacher-assessed grades they begin to lose their power to drive teaching and learning.

WHAT NEXT?

WANT TO ENHANCE YOUR ASSESSMENT SUPERPOWERS? *

Choose from two innovative courses of professional learning from Evidence Based Education's Assessment Academy

ASSESSMENT LEAD PROGRAMME

- Whole-school approach to improving your assessment practice, policy and framework
- c. 50 hours CPD over 3 terms plus tools and guides to create powerful high-quality questions and assessments
- Minimum of two staff per school
- £1,200 per school (inc. two staff)

ASSESSMENT ESSENTIALS

- What every teacher needs to know about assessment
- 10-week short course including expert insight from Dylan Wiliam and teachers at the forefront of assessment practice
- Available to individuals or the whole teaching staff
- £95 per person

Develop the assessment knowledge, skill and confidence to make better use of assessment in your classrooms and school. Make more reliable judgements about what pupils know, can do and need next.

Find out more at www.evidencebased.education/assessment-academy

*** cape and mask not included**