

Demonstrating progress – a positive view to assessment

Assessment is essential in the educational process, and no matter how young our pupils are, should be part and package of any English learning programme. Describing this irksome component as “demonstrating progress” encourages us to approach assessment with a more positive attitude, it naturally becomes an integral part of the educational process and puts the achievement of the learner at its centre.

Six steps to remember

Step one: Assessment and objectives should be seen together.

It is important to see objectives and assessment as partners. If you don't know why you are teaching English to your children you will not be able to assess them properly.

Step two: Assessment should be integrated in and supportive of the educational process.

In the young learner classroom we are working hard to create a supportive and understanding environment for our children to enjoy learning English. When assessing these children we cannot alter this delicate balance of learning and fun. Assessment therefore has to mirror our everyday language learning activities.

Step three: Assessment should be holistic, catering for the whole child.

In young learner classrooms our approach should be one of catering for the whole child, trying to understand the child's attitude, motivation, feelings, social and physical characteristics. As young learner teachers we should apply assessment thoughts to all of this.

Step four: Assessment should be seen as an achievement made by individuals based on previous attainments / performances, focussing on what individual children can do, emphasising their strengths not their weaknesses.

No one child is the same: some children come to the classroom with their minds full of information gained from their out of class lives, some arrive ready for filling! A teacher needs to recognise where a child starts and where they are in relation to this start after a period of time – recognise how much progress has been made by each individual child.

Step five: Assessment should be continuous and formative, although not always formal and recorded.

Children learn by doing, interacting with their environment and the language they are learning. By observing children at regular intervals during these interactions, a teacher can informally document what a child is able to do. Anecdotal notes can be as informative as many formal assessment methodologies.

Step six: Assessment should be collaborative: involving all those who are part of the children's lives - teachers, carers, parents and families;

If we want assessment to work for everyone, we need to include all those involved in the child's education. Communicating objectives and progress over a period of time to parents and carers and the child is of great importance, and by feeding information from all these sources into assessment we provide a much more complete picture of progression.

Which assessment procedures?

Three assessment procedures should be highlighted to deal with assessing children. Each procedure is a thing in itself but is easily linked to the others, and if we are to **do** assessment successfully we should really think of all three procedures as one.

- 1) Observation and student profiles
- 2) Self assessment
- 3) Portfolios

1) Observation and student profiles

To be able to observe successfully, a teacher must get to know their group of children as quickly as possible. Building a relationship with the children will make it easier to understand them as individuals and how they are progressing. It will provide the teacher with a starting point for each child. Observation is the ideal assessment tool for younger children because it does not interrupt their learning adventure – observation is part of the learning and teaching adventure.

A student profile is a very good *aide mémoire* for observation purposes, it helps a teacher focus on what to observe and situates a child within a set of learning objectives. Student profiles often appear at the end of a teacher's book and teachers can adapt these profiles for their own contexts.

2) Self assessment

This is an area of assessment which is becoming increasingly accepted. Children are able to think about what they have done, how they felt while they participated and, to a certain extent, evaluate their progress. The earlier they are required to do this, the easier it is for them and as they grow older the more accurate they become. Don't forget that we are assessing interest, motivation and enjoyment: children can tell you if they enjoyed a lesson, an activity, a game, a story; if they felt they could do something easily; if they think they can say some of the words they have been using in the classroom with you.

3) Portfolios

A portfolio is a collection of work, in this case one that illustrates what a child can do in English. It is often a collection of all the things we have already discussed, plus a selection of children's work. The latter can be from classroom work or something they have done by themselves or at home on their own initiative. Whatever it is there is a focus on language development over time. Children should be encouraged to select the work they'd like to keep in the portfolio, and once they realise that they are part of an assessment procedure they will take this selection very seriously. If teacher and child speak the same mother tongue, recording in writing why they chose certain items for their portfolio can be interesting. Over time certain items will be discarded as better examples are produced. A portfolio is a growing thing, it changes over time, evolving with the child ... demonstrating progress.

Visit <http://culture2.coe.int/portfolio> for more information on portfolios.

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