The ARBs and Assessment for Learning

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Chris Joyce, 2005

Assessment is about gathering evidence of what a student can do.

Since 2003 the main focus of the Assessment Resource Banks has been on **formative assessment** (**assessment for learning**).

Assessment becomes formative when the evidence from assessment is used to adapt teaching and improve learning. It is an integral part of the teaching and learning process.

How do the Assessment Resource Banks support formative assessment?

The Assessment Resource Banks give you access to over 2,600 resources in English, Mathematics, and Science.

The assessment tasks are designed to be incorporated into your normal classroom programme. Each has a specific assessment focus. In some cases a number of resources addressing the same concept but within different contexts are provided.

Tasks are designed to elicit students' responses, and why they have made that response.

Tasks may include:

- immediate feedback to students
- questions that help students think about their responses
- support for students to make judgements about their work.

All the tasks have been trialled with New Zealand students. Information from the trials is drawn on to help teachers and students identify strengths and weaknesses. You can share or adapt some of this material to help your students make decisions about their learning.

The teachers' pages provide:

- information to help you analyse students' responses
- make decisions about what to do next.

They may include the following:

- extra teacher information to assist in their subject knowledge
- suggestions for possible next learning steps for students
- other resources to use
- links to relevant research.

Selecting ARB resources for formative assessment

Choose resources that:

- are suited to the needs, interests, and experiences of your class
- can be included as part of normal classroom activities
- encourage conversation, either between students, or between student and teacher

- clearly match the intended learning/assessment focus
- show the criteria against which performance is judged
- allow students to show what they can do (generally, but not always, open-ended tasks are better)
- provide feedback to students and the teacher about skills and understanding.

There is a variety of types of tasks available:

- selected responses, short and long answer questions, open-ended questions and practical tasks (often a combination within one task)
- completed on-line or with pencil and paper (some tasks have two versions).

Collecting the information

Any task or activity that helps a student and teacher pinpoint important learning needs may be used for formative assessment.

You can collect information through:

- observation
- questioning
- setting tasks that require students to use skills or apply ideas
- holding conversations with the students about their work.

Think about the best way for your students to use the task. If the assessment focus suits, you may get more valid information for formative purposes by

- asking the questions orally
- students responding orally
- reading the questions to students
- working in groups
- using questions as discussion starters
- talking to students about their responses.

Be careful, though, that changes you make don't impact on what you are assessing. For example, if the focus is on writing science explanations, the task has to be written.

Self- and peer-assessment

Self- and peer-assessment are an integral part of formative assessment. Encourage students to be actively involved in making judgements about their work and their progress towards their learning goal.

For students to learn from assessment they not only have to gather evidence of their learning, but also:

- analyse their work in terms of the goal/standard
- make decisions about what they need to do to improve
- know what to do to close the gap
- monitor their progress towards achieving this.

Selecting ARB resources for self- and peer-assessment

Use keywords "self assessment" or "peer assessment" when searching for resources.

Use keyword "work samples" to search for annotated examples of student work. These

can be used by students to

- set goals for their own work
- identify features of the task to attend to
- identify features of exemplary work
- practise critiquing work.

The information in the teachers' pages can often be modified for students to develop self- and peer-assessment tasks.

Using the information

Black and Wiliam say that often teachers collect information using the above methods, but do not use it in ways that promote learning. They found that effective formative assessment

- promotes learning
- involves the teacher believing that every student can improve
- promotes conversations between student and teacher
- promotes conversations between students
- provides feedback and feed forward to students that helps them identify what they need to do to improve
- encourages students to set their own learning goals
- allows students to demonstrate what they know and can do
- clearly indicates to the student what is being assessed
- the performance criteria obvious to the student
- motivates students to want to learn.

To find out more see Next Steps.

Overall Teacher Judgements

The ARB resources can be used to contribute to Overall Teacher Judgements (OTJ) about students. They can be used to probe areas of interest in greater depth. Many ARB tasks include ways to explore why a student gives a particular response. Once it is understood what is going wrong for a student it is much easier to decide what to do next.

An appropriate ARB task may

- provide further information for focusing next teaching
- provide additional evidence that an aspect of a standard has been reached
- confirm that an aspect of a standard has not yet been mastered.

The notes for teachers that accompany each ARB task help you analyse student work. Suggestions are made for possible next learning steps.

To read more go to OTJs, Learning Progression Frameworks, and the ARBs »

Teacher-made assessment

The ARBs provide tried models of assessment tasks. Teachers preparing their own assessment materials may wish to adapt some of the approaches and ideas used in the ARB resources.

Note: If you change a resource, the information and difficulty levels in the teachers' pages may no longer be appropriate for the modified resource.

Good assessment practice includes providing a range of options for students to show what they know and can do. For ideas for a variety of ways to assess students explore assessment strategies in Research and articles.

Some of these assessment strategies include:

- Predict, Observe, Explain (POE)
- Using concept cartoons for assessment
- Progressive disclosure
- Classroom discourse (Mathematics)

Explore Research and articles for more assessment strategies.

Reference

Inside the black box: Raising standards through classroom assessment, Black and Wiliam

Click to search for ARB resources