

## Unit 3, Section 3

# Assessment and Monitoring Arrangements

## Key Issues

- Assessment plays a key role in providing for gifted and talented pupils, whose progress is often significantly in advance of that of their peers. The assessment should be of a kind that takes full account of prior learning and supports the learning process.
- Assessment in support of learning has implications for classroom methodology, curriculum content, and the learning process.
- Assessment for gifted and talented pupils should be located within a consistent school policy for monitoring, assessment, recording, and reporting, and should not be a separate entity.
- Planning for progression involves the setting of targets for learning, even for those already achieving highly. The targets set for gifted and talented pupils should be challenging enough to stretch them and to help them fulfil their potential.
- When setting targets, the school should involve the pupils. In common with other pupils, the gifted and talented pupils should be given an understanding of the objectives for particular learning activities, and of the skills, knowledge, and thinking processes involved.

## Background

In this section we will ask how assessment can support the quality and nature of learning for gifted and talented pupils. Viewed in this way, assessment is part of a cycle of activities and classroom practice which gives expression to a distinct teaching and learning programme for these pupils.

Summative testing and examinations are significant elements of educational assessment, but assessment has undergone and is still undergoing what Gipps (1994) calls 'a paradigm shift, from psychometrics to a broader model of educational assessment, from a testing and examination to an assessment culture'. In this section we shall be looking at those aspects of this paradigm shift which link assessment closely to effective teaching and learning, and ask how it can support the learning process.

In Unit One we considered the relative value of different kinds of assessment for the purpose of identifying specific talents and abilities, and emphasised the importance of taking full account of pupils' strengths and weaknesses. The same rigorous approach should apply to selecting from the range of assessment techniques for day-to-day use in the classroom. These should be subject to critical evaluation for their fitness of purpose.

## Formative assessment for learning

Initially, it is useful to categorise the range of techniques in terms of assessment **of** learning and assessment **for** learning, which we will consider in turn. The former is essentially summative, and the results are often put to use for managerial purposes outside the classroom, although they can also inform targets for learning and curriculum planning. The latter is essentially formative and can take place at any time and in a variety of contexts, usually within the classroom (Stobart and Gipps 1997). Its purpose is to produce information about a pupil's understanding, mental processes, and performance, to enable teachers to plan appropriate curriculum content and learning activities. In the course of this section we shall be looking at both formative and summative assessment, and at the demands they make and the opportunities they offer.

Broadfoot (1996) summarises how assessment influences learning in four main ways:

1. Assessment provides motivation to learn
  - by giving a sense of success in the subject (or demotivation through failure);
  - through giving the student a sense of self-confidence as a learner.
2. Assessment helps students (and teachers) to decide what to learn
  - by highlighting what it is important to learn, as distinct from what is taught;
  - by providing feedback on success so far.
3. Assessment helps students learn how to learn
  - by encouraging an active or passive learning style;
  - by influencing the choice of learning strategies;
  - by nurturing self-monitoring skills;
  - by developing the students' ability to retain and apply knowledge, skills and understanding in different contexts.
4. Assessment helps students learn to judge the effectiveness of their learning
  - by evaluating existing learning;
  - by consolidating or transforming existing learning;
  - by reinforcing new learning.

Assessment defined in these ways is an essential part of the learning cycle, and its relevance for gifted and talented pupils is clear. The process consists of determining their strengths and recognising their weaknesses, deciding what they should go on to learn, and how, and helping them to judge the measure of their success.

There is substantial evidence to link the careful monitoring of individual progress to high standards of achievement. This has been identified in numerous inspections conducted by Ofsted, and it was the subject of an extensive review of the literature by Black and William (1998). This showed that formative assessment within the classroom, when properly carried out, is a powerful means of improving the quality of a pupil's learning. It also suggested, however, that high-quality formative assessment is relatively rare in classrooms. Where it does occur, it often emphasises quantity rather than quality. It also tends to assess recall and application, rather than the higher order skills of analysis and synthesis which are crucial to realising the full potential of the most able pupils.

The Key Stage 3 Strategy places particular importance on integrating high quality formative assessment into everyday teaching and learning.

Formative assessment at its best involves feedback of a very thorough nature, and its particular importance for gifted and talented pupils is that:

- it has the potential to encourage the kind of learning most appropriate for them: 'If we wish to foster higher order skills, including application of knowledge, investigating and analysing, (and) reasoning and interpretation,.....then we need our assessment system to reflect this' (Gipps, 1994);
- it has the potential to identify clear progression routes;
- it allows pupils to show the extent of their knowledge, skills, and understanding, upon which differentiation and extension planning can be securely founded;
- it allows 'fine tuning' for individual needs ; by this means an individual's achievements are viewed in relation to himself or herself, rather than to those of others or to defined criteria;
- it allows pupils themselves to be part of the assessment process by making use of their metacognitive abilities.

Schools which have been assessed as making good provision for gifted and talented pupils have been found to demonstrate these very factors.

Later in the Unit we shall look at the important issue of intervention and questioning by the teacher, and of his or her beliefs and expectations. These factors, which are so important in the teaching of gifted and talented pupils, have a key role in formative assessment practices of high quality.

## Summative assessment of learning

Schools will also want to consider the part to be played by school-based summative assessments. How far do these reflect the nature and quality of the learning and skills we would aim to develop in gifted and talented pupils? Do they enable these pupils to manifest the thinking processes and levels of performance of which they are capable? Schools may also want to examine how far certain forms of summative assessment promote or disadvantage particular groups, along the lines suggested in Unit 1 for identifying gifted and talented pupils. It is worth remembering that, at its best, summative assessment has served as a spur for the raising of standards.

As the DfES' 'Developing a teaching and learning programme' suggests, the school will need to measure the performance of the able pupil cohort at the ends of Key Stages 3 and 4, and their progress within each year and each key stage. For example,

- how many of the intake achieved high levels in their Key Stage 2 assessment, and are still achieving highly at the end of their first year in the school?
- how many Year 9 pupils are achieving Level 6/7 or above in the Key Stage 3 assessment?
- how many pupils are achieving five or more GCSE grades at A/A\*?
- how many A level pupils, if the school has them, are achieving the highest grades?

A benchmark for the answers to such questions will be what is being achieved in other, similar schools.

## Assessment of prior learning

At an early point, therefore, the teacher will need to establish clearly the extent of the pupil's current understanding, ie the outcomes of prior learning. Not only is this vital if the pupil's motivation and interest are to be engaged, but it will also help to identify those pupils who may be underachieving. Teachers need to know what teaching programmes and experiences the pupils have had as well as the level of their achievement. The importance of such information underlines the need for consistency in the way in which it is transmitted from teacher to teacher and school to school. Recent research has focused on the transition from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3. It has indicated that if there is inadequate information about pupils' achievement, or a disregard for continuity and progression, pupils entering Key Stage 3 can face a lack of challenge and slower rates of progress. There is a variety of ways in which teachers can carry out assessment within the classroom to measure prior knowledge against the new knowledge or skills to be introduced.

## Target setting

In July 1998 the Government issued regulations for the setting of targets in schools (Circular 11/98). Targets have been set for classes and year groups, and also for individual pupils, and 'benchmarking' has become an important component of the process. Benchmarks represent the standard of achievement accomplished by the best performers of a group. They show what can be achieved by pupils in certain schools, and thus present a challenge to schools whose characteristics are similar.

At its best, the process of target setting involves the pupil, and this has a particular relevance for gifted and talented pupils. In common with other pupils, they should be given an understanding of the objectives for particular learning activities, and of the skills, knowledge, and thinking processes involved. The targets themselves will be governed by a number of factors, including the demands of external examinations, but they should always offer the pupil a challenge. In a joint study with the then Berkshire LEA, NFER (1997) conceived of 'target zones' in the following terms:

- *The historic zone.* Targets in this zone are those which are *behind* current performance, which is hidden to the extent that others are not aware of its quality. By this means, standstill can be represented as improvement, and it is a means of 'domesticating' any threats that targets may offer.
- *The comfort zone.* Targets in this zone seek to keep improvement very much within reach, and they often reflect a belief that there is really no need to improve.
- *The smart zone.* Targets in this zone are sufficiently ahead of the present state of play to make a difference.
- *The unlikely zone* Targets in this zone seek large improvements, through 'determination and high aspiration, or recklessness'. They can be a recipe for high risk and high stress.

These definitions can clearly be adapted for setting targets for individual gifted and talented pupils, and it needs no guesswork to arrive at which of the zones is the ideal. This would also be the one calculated to match the criterion in the DfES' 'Developing a teaching and learning programme', which says that the programme must be based on individual targets for each pupil in the able pupil cohort. These 'must be challenging enough to stretch them in areas of relative strength and develop areas of relative weakness.' The DfES guidance adds that there should also be targets 'focused on motivation, self-esteem, attendance, behaviour, participation, etc.'

## School assessment policies

In Section 5 of this Unit we shall be looking at school policies, and in particular at the school's policy for gifted and talented pupils. We can anticipate that section by referring here to the school's assessment policy, which of course bears upon all the learning that takes place in the school, at whatever level. All schools now have assessment policies, and these come in for close scrutiny in Ofsted inspections. A particular focus is the extent to which there is a coherent approach, as opposed to varying practices between departments and from one teacher to another.

From your reading and from your own reflection, you will have concluded that a consistent and integrated approach to assessment throughout the school is essential if all pupils are to fulfil their potential. In the earlier part of this section we looked at specific needs of the gifted and talented pupils. If the school has developed a distinct and differentiated approach to assessment for these pupils, this should be embodied in the whole school assessment policy.

### Activity 3.3

#### Reflection:

- φ What formative assessment issues do you identify as being of particular significance to G&T pupils?
- φ How might these translate into classroom practice in a range of subject areas? How does the Key Stage 3 National Strategy address these issues?

## Learning Outcomes

- Recognise the importance of assessment in providing effectively for gifted and talented pupils
- Understand the importance of the planning of assessment activities which match good practice in the teaching of gifted and talented children, and which enable them to fulfil their potential
- Gain knowledge of strategies for assessing pupils' prior learning and current learning.
- Recognise the role of target setting in pupils' learning
- Recognise the importance of a consistent approach to assessment, recording, and reporting.

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## **Websites**

Phi Delta Kappan: <http://www.pdkintl.org/kappan/kbla9810.htm>

