

Key Stage 3

National Strategy

Practice

Curriculum and
Standards

Working together: teaching assistants and assessment for learning

**Teachers, teaching
assistants and
SENCOs**

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creating opportunity, releasing potential, achieving excellence

Working together: teaching assistants and assessment for learning

Support staff working alongside teachers have already contributed to significant improvements in the quality of teaching and learning and the effective functioning of their schools.

National agreement for schools' workforce reform, 2003

Acknowledgements

Black, P. and Wiliam, D. (1998) *Inside the black box: raising standards through classroom assessment*. King's College, London.

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Working together: teaching assistants and assessment for learning

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Introduction

Assessment for learning (AfL) helps teachers to help pupils understand where they are in their learning, where they need to go and how they can get there. By sharing clear learning objectives, providing informative oral and written feedback, and using skilful questioning, teachers help pupils to take increasing responsibility for their own learning.

In lessons where AfL is part of everyday teaching, pupils become increasingly independent, are typically highly motivated and engage with the learning. A lot of work is in pairs or in small groups. Pupils regularly reflect on their learning, discuss their work, and seek advice and assistance when they need it.

AfL promotes the full participation of all pupils of all abilities and a culture in which all pupils are confident they can improve because they are aware of their successes and the progress they are making.

In this environment, teaching assistants (TAs) are at the front line. Working closely with the teacher they can provide informative feedback to pupils, help discussion and sustain the pace of learning.

Using this study guide

These materials will help you to develop your role as a teaching assistant by promoting and embedding good practice in assessment for learning in the classroom.

As a teaching assistant, you work in partnership with teachers. To get the most from these materials you will need to identify a teacher to work with who is as keen

as you are to develop your role in the classroom and who will help, support and work collaboratively with you. This can result in a valuable exchange of ideas and joint problem solving.

You should aim to work through these materials over the course of several weeks, working closely with the teacher to plan, trial and review the activities.

Ideally, this will be part of your school's overall drive to develop assessment for learning and you will be in good company – among many colleagues, teaching assistants and teachers striving to develop their practice.

To get the most out of this guide you will need the support of your line manager. The importance of support from the senior leadership team to help teaching assistants develop their practice and to help teachers work effectively with teaching assistants is promoted in the 'Guidance for senior leaders' section of this AfL folder.

You can work through the materials in a number of ways.

- Start small: choose one class, one group of pupils or one pupil to work with.
- Work with another TA or group of TAs who support the same class or group of pupils. Work together on your approach to develop assessment for learning. After three weeks compare notes. Discuss which strategies are most effective and why.
- As part of the whole-school initiative on assessment for learning, work with a small group of teachers, TAs or other support staff within your school. Use the booklet to help you focus on the agreed AfL theme for whole-school development. Record your successes in your continuing professional development (CPD) portfolio.
- If 'coaching' is established in your school, work with a coach to develop your skills in assessment for learning. (See 'Coaching for AfL' DfES, DfES 1100-2005 G.)

The materials assume that you have some prior knowledge and understanding of AfL. For instance, you may have been part of whole-school training on AfL or have been involved in departmental training. The training folder 'Assessment for learning – whole school training materials' (DfES 0043-2004), of which this study guide is a part, is designed to support whole-school and departmental development of AfL. If you have not been involved in whole-school training you will find it useful to refer to Unit 12 of 'Pedagogy and practice – teaching and learning in secondary schools' (DfES 0243-2004).

The broader issues of using teaching assistants effectively, and the school systems needed to support good collaboration between teachers and support staff, are addressed in the DfES booklet 'Induction training for teaching assistants in secondary schools' (2004).

This study guide contains:

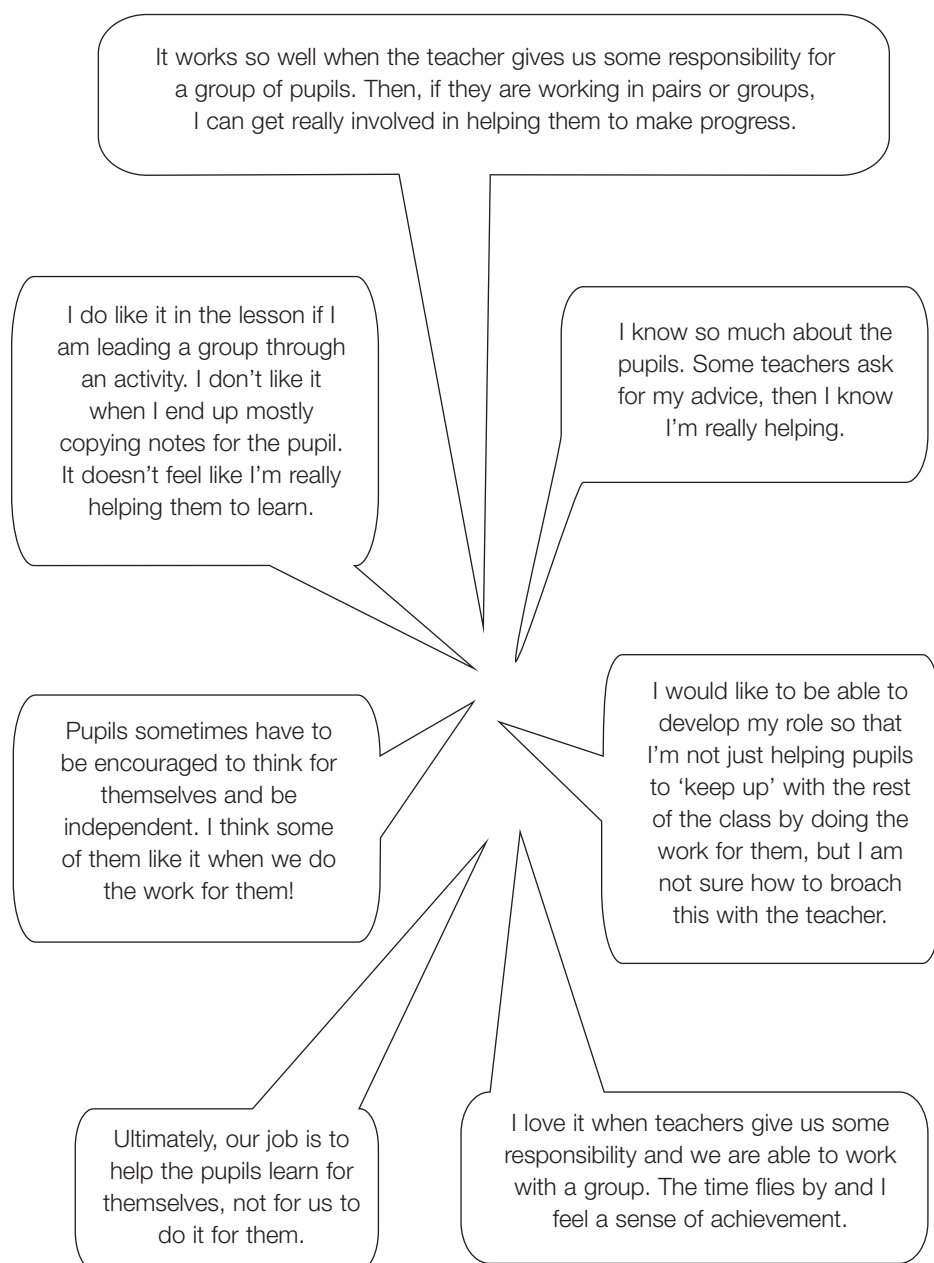
- quotes and suggestions from teaching assistants who have trialled some of these ideas
- 'reflections', to help you reflect on an idea or on your own practice
- practical tips
- tasks to help you consider advice or try out strategies in the classroom
- some suggestions for next steps and further reading.

The accompanying DVD offers examples of some of the strategies and ideas discussed.

By working through these materials in collaboration with the teachers that you support you will develop your understanding, skills and practice in assessment for learning and enhance the learning of the pupils you work with.

Your role as a teaching assistant

As a teaching assistant you can have a huge impact in the classroom and really contribute to pupils' learning. However, in some cases your role may not be as well developed as it could be, and your skills and knowledge of the pupils may not be made full use of. The following quotations relate to some of the challenges that teaching assistants face.



Task 1**Reflecting on your role****15 minutes**

The 'scaling exercise' that follows will help you to reflect on your role as a teaching assistant.

Consider each question and circle the appropriate point on the scale that best describes your current situation. This is about assessing your opportunities (and training) to do things, not about your personal capabilities.

If you provide support in a number of subjects or in different classes make an overall 'best fit' judgement, or use this exercise to identify how you feel your role is different in different lessons.

	Rarely			Always
	1	2	3	4
Do you discuss with the teacher the purpose of a series of lessons – i.e. where they are going in terms of what the pupils need to learn?				
Do you understand what the pupils are trying to learn in in each lesson and how they can demonstrate achievement?				
Do you feel you can recognise the standards pupils are aiming for in a lesson and recognise very good achievement for the pupils you work with?				
Do you understand the purpose of each lesson activity?				
Are there agreed strategies to respond to individual pupils' needs?				
Do you help the teacher build on the learning in previous lessons so that all pupils will be able to take part?				
Do you feel able to make decisions, such as adapting an activity, as you work with pupils during the lessons?				
Do you feel able to ask the right questions to help pupils focus on what they are trying to learn?				
Do you feel you help groups of pupils to work better together, listen to each other and help each other learn?				
Do you have opportunities to discuss pupils' progress with the teacher during a lesson?				
Do you have opportunities to discuss pupils' progress with the teacher after a lesson?				
Do you contribute to record keeping and collect evidence of pupils' progress for formal assessments?				

Through this exercise you will have identified some areas you may wish to begin to develop with the teacher, and others you are already competent in but may wish to enhance.

Existing practice in assessment for learning

You are probably using these materials because your school has identified AfL as a whole-school priority and therefore you will already have established some understanding of what is meant by AfL through attending whole-school training and through the recommended reading.

It will be helpful, when working through these materials, if you are clear about what the AfL focus is for your school and what specific aspects are being worked on in the classrooms that you support. You may find that departments and teachers are at different stages in developing AfL. Teachers cannot develop every aspect of AfL at once and research shows that the process takes time.

The 'AfL whole-school training materials' (DfES 0043-2004 G) recommend that departments review their existing practice and it would be helpful if you contributed to this. You may be working in a number of different classrooms and with a variety of subjects and will be able to provide valuable insights. Some subject areas may find certain aspects of AfL more challenging than others.

If you did not contribute to the departmental reviews of existing practice or have not yet seen the results of the review, the following task will be useful. It will remind you of the key characteristics of assessment for learning but also asks you to reflect on the variety of practice that you may experience in your school.

Task 2

Characteristics of AfL

15 minutes

The table on the next page describes the key characteristics of assessment for learning and teaching strategies that support their development.

Think about the classrooms you work in.

Tick the final column if you recognise a key characteristic as being a regular feature in lessons.

Share and discuss your observations with the teacher that you are working with. It may be that the strategies the teacher is using are not obvious or easily recognised.

If you are not sure if you have recognised the characteristics of AfL, look out for these features in the lessons you are supporting this week.

Key characteristics of assessment for learning	Teaching strategies	This is a regular feature in the lessons that I support
Sharing learning objectives with the pupils	The pupils know what they are trying to learn and they are reminded of this frequently during the lesson. The teacher ensures that learning objectives are expressed in a language that pupils can understand. Objectives are used to focus questioning and feedback during the lesson.	
Helping pupils to know and recognise the standards they are aiming for	Pupils know exactly what they have to do in order to achieve the learning objective. There are clear success criteria that link with the learning objectives. The teacher may model what it should look like or give pupils examples of work that has reached the standard and explain where it has met specific criteria.	
Involving pupils in self and peer assessment	Pupils have the opportunity to talk about what they find difficult, using the learning objectives as a focus. They are asked to explain their thinking and are given time to reflect on their learning.	
Providing feedback that leads pupils to recognising the next steps and how to take them	Pupils are given oral as well as written feedback whenever possible. Feedback is constructive so that pupils know where they have achieved well and what they need to do next in order to improve.	
Promoting confidence that every pupil can achieve	Pupils are encouraged to explain their thinking and reasoning, and are able to voice their opinion. Confidence is built by setting appropriate and achievable targets that identify the next small steps in their learning.	
Involve teacher and pupil in reviewing and reflecting on assessment information	There is time in the lesson to reflect on learning and identify the next steps.	

The departmental review, and task 2, 'Characteristics of AfL', will help you to identify some aspects of AfL that will be a focus in the coming weeks. Alongside this, you will find it helpful to work through these materials. You can either work through them step by step or, in agreement with the teacher, you may prefer to focus on particular areas.

Sharing learning objectives and outcomes

I didn't understand what the task was about. Sometimes I don't know what the class are supposed to be learning and I leave the lesson feeling quite confused, never mind the pupils!

*Teaching assistant
working with Year 7*

A key characteristic of AfL is that it involves sharing learning objectives and outcomes with pupils. Clear and precise learning objectives help pupils know what they are trying to learn. Clear and precise intended learning outcomes help pupils recognise achievement.

You need to be clear about the learning objectives and learning outcomes for the lesson, ideally through a brief discussion with the teacher. You also need to understand 'the big picture'. How does this link with and build on previous learning? Where does it fit in? Where will the learning go next?

Pupils may have a good understanding of individual tasks (that is, what they have to do), but little sense of the purpose of the task and what they are trying to learn. Even when they can explain what they are trying to learn they cannot always recognise when they have been successful.

Learning objectives need to be simply and clearly expressed and referred to during the lesson. You have an important role in ensuring that the pupils you are working with understand what they are trying to learn. It is common practice for teachers to write learning objectives on the board at the beginning of the lesson. Sometimes teachers think they are explaining what pupils will be seeking to learn but are only telling them what they are going to do. The teachers you work with will be aware of this but it is not always easy to get right.

Unit 3 of this AfL training folder ('Objective led lessons') goes into this in detail.

You can help pupils to clarify the learning objectives for the lesson by asking or saying the following.

- [Say name], *what are we learning about today?*
- *Tell me what you already know about what we are learning today.*
- *Tell me what you are going to be able to do by the end of this lesson, [say name].*
- [Say name], *last lesson we learned about... How does that fit in with what we are learning today?*
- *Today we are learning to... Can you remember when we learned something similar last week/month/term?*
- *I will write out the learning objective for you but I want you to highlight the words you think are really important.*
- *Tell me why you think we are learning about this today.*

You will need to adapt this appropriately for the pupils you are supporting and for the specific lesson objectives. However, remember that discussing the learning objectives with pupils, to ensure that they understand them, is a valuable use of time.

Towards the end of a lesson you can ask a pupil to tell you what they have learned. This helps pupils to recognise the progress they are making. You could go back to some of the questions you asked at the beginning of the lesson. For example,

remind the pupil of what they said they were going to be able to do and ask whether this has been achieved.

The following 'Think, pair, and share' activities are alternative examples of how you might approach this. Say the following to pupils.

- *Discuss with your partner what you have learned this lesson.*
- *Discuss with your partner what you think they have learned this lesson.*
- *Discuss with your partner the main points of today's lesson.*
- *Explain to your partner what you achieved today and how you did it.*
- *Tell your partner two things you are going to remember from today's lesson.*

Task 3

Sharing learning objectives

30 minutes

Watch the pre-lesson discussion between the teacher and the TA, from the 'Working together: teaching assistants and AfL' area of the Assessment for learning DVD. Notice how the teacher communicates the learning objectives to the TA. What does the TA contribute to the planning of the lesson?

Discuss with the teacher what is being taught in a forthcoming lesson that you will be supporting. Ensure that you are clear about the learning objectives and learning outcomes. Devise a set of questions or activities that you can use during the lesson to help the pupils understand what they are trying to learn, and how to recognise their achievements, and build on them as they make progress.

Reflection

After the lesson, reflect with the class teacher on how effective these questions and activities were. Read the progression table 'Reviewing existing practice in objective led lessons' in Appendix 1. Would you describe the pupils' response as 'developing', 'establishing' or 'enhancing'?

Agree with the class teacher some plans for moving the pupils to the next stage.

Helping pupils to understand the standards they are aiming for

Pupils need to know and recognise the standards they are aiming for. They need to understand 'what a good piece of work looks like'. They need to know why it is considered 'good' and what specific features contributed to that judgement. They need to be given some suggestions of what to do, or include, if they are going to reach a similar standard, and what they need to do to reach the next stage in their learning.

'Enhanced' practice involves pupils being aware of a range of possible learning outcomes, and being able to determine and improve their achievements in relation to success criteria. The next step in developing your practice is considering with the teacher how you can help move the pupils, over time, to the 'enhancing' stage.

When they are clear about what makes a good piece of work, pupils can then focus on what is required. Pupils can waste valuable learning time by taking part in activities that do not really support their learning or demonstrate their knowledge, understanding or skills (e.g. concentrating on presentation when

So often pupils say things like: 'I don't get it. What are we supposed to be doing?' They don't have any idea of where they are heading. If you can show them some good examples of things that other pupils have done or some examples that you have prepared, it's really helpful.

Teaching assistant working with Year 8

In some lessons I might take a group of gifted and talented pupils, in another lesson a group that have special needs. I find it really helpful when there are differentiated learning outcomes. It gives me a steer on where I might challenge the pupils a bit more.

*Teaching assistant
working with Year 9*

developing ideas is the main point of the lesson, or concentrating on ideas when improving style of presentation is the main point of the lesson). They may have put a lot of time and energy into something and then feel frustrated because they have tried hard but not achieved well. Being very clear about what is valued, and showing some 'good' examples, will help promote successful progress.

You can help pupils to know what they are aiming for as learners by:

- 'modelling' success – for instance, providing examples of pupils' work or clear success criteria;
- showing pupils the stages they need to go through to achieve success as a 'ladder', each rung representing the next step they need to learn;
- working closely with the teacher to gain an understanding of what these stages are and agree what is appropriately challenging for the pupils you support.

Task 4

Identifying learning outcomes

60 minutes

Reflect on your personal experiences of learning. Were standards always made explicit to you?

How can you help your pupils feel more secure about how they can progress?

Talk to the class teacher about a lesson, or series of lessons, that will require a specific outcome. In discussion with the teacher, identify the learning outcomes and provide some examples of the 'finished product' completed to various standards. You could use pupils' work from previous years or another class (you might like to cover up the names of the pupils), or make some yourself. Afterwards, discuss with the pupils how the examples helped them.

Reflection

How well did this activity work? What went well? What could have been improved?

What did your pupils say about how well the 'examples' helped them to achieve the learning outcomes?

What improvements did you find in the quality of the work that your pupils produced?

Revisit the progression table 'Reviewing existing practice in objective led lessons' in Appendix 1. How would you describe your pupils' response?

Discuss your findings with the teacher and agree on how you might make this activity even more useful for the pupils next time.

Watch the post-lesson discussion, from the 'Working together: teaching assistants and AfL' area of the Assessment for learning DVD. What suggestion does Lesley give the teacher about using a model? Why does she suggest this?

Peer and self assessment

One of the early steps in developing peer and self assessment involves pupils understanding the standards they are aiming for. Pupils can be helped to recognise

features of success in their peers' work which, in turn, helps them assess their own work. Look at the second progression table ('Reviewing existing practice in peer and self assessment') in Appendix 1. This will help you to see the development that takes place as pupils become skilled in peer and self assessment.

Developing peer and self assessment needs to be tackled in stages. In the early stages pupils may need to be shown how to consider and comment on another's work. Working with an 'anonymous' example can often be more effective because there is no threat from peers, and friends are not making judgements about each others' work. The teacher may use the example with the whole class, demonstrating how to comment and respond before expecting pupils to work on each other's or their own work. Alternatively, if you are working with a small group, you could lead this process. It is helpful to 'think aloud' when you do this so that pupils develop the necessary language and see the process being modelled. In effect, you are making thinking 'visible'.

I like the way Susan has put a definition of global warming on the first page. These quotes are useful. And I wonder if this would be better if it were moved? What a good idea to include an effect of global warming here. I wonder why she didn't use another couple of examples?

If appropriate, you could go back to the examples of pupils' work that you used in task 4, 'Identifying learning outcomes', and ask pupils to assess them against specific criteria. Having demonstrated the process with an anonymous piece of work, the pupils can then work on each other's.

Depending on the situation that you work in, there may be some initial barriers to overcome before self assessment can be fully developed. For example, if the pupils aren't sufficiently clear about the learning objectives and success criteria, they will find it difficult to carry out effective self assessment.

Pupils need to feel confident about discussing and expressing their opinions and having their views valued by others. Pupils also need to understand the sort of language they should use when discussing the work of others. Successful learning and high self-esteem go hand in hand, and it is crucial that peer assessment is a constructive, positive experience.

You can help to manage group talk so that contributions are positive and constructive. A useful guide to managing group work can be found in Unit 10, 'Pedagogy and practice: teaching and learning in secondary schools'.

With the class teacher, identify a lesson where you are going to work with a small group on peer assessment. Plan an oral prompt sheet or a writing frame to give to your pupils to support this strategy. Here are some examples of prompts you can use.

- *This is your best sentence because...*
- *You could improve this example by...*
- *You have met the criteria by...*
- *You have not met the criteria because...*
- *To reach the next stage you need to...*

Plan sufficient time to allow for discussion and subsequent action.

Reflection

Make a note of how this activity went. Discuss your findings with the class teacher and consider how you would alter or improve the activity if you were to repeat it.

Now reflect on the pupils' responses and, using the second progression table in Appendix 1 ('Reviewing existing practice in peer and self assessment'), decide with the class teacher which stage best describes your pupils and what strategies might be used to move them on to the next stage.

Traffic lights

An alternative strategy is to ask pupils to 'traffic light' their work. Here's how this works.

- Give the pupils green, red and yellow pens or pieces of card.
 - Pupils who feel they have achieved the learning objective and that they could explain it to another pupil show green.
 - Those who are fairly confident but there might be one or two areas they want to work on display yellow.
 - Those who feel they need more help and support in achieving this objective display red.
- Ask the pupils to elaborate on their decisions with examples or evidence.

This strategy provides valuable feedback on how the pupils have responded to the work and how well they have understood what has been taught. This information can then be passed on to the class teacher so that subsequent lessons can be adapted accordingly.

'Traffic lighting' can be used with the group you are working with at the beginning of the lesson to indicate how confident the pupils feel about the topic that has just been introduced. This is a very useful way of establishing what the pupils already know about a topic and how confident they feel about it. It may be possible, as a result of this activity, to adapt the lesson and spend more or less time on certain areas as a result.

Traffic lighting can also be used during the lesson as pupils work. You will need to think carefully about whether your pupils will be prepared to reveal in public how

I think it takes time to develop this strategy. The pupils have to feel they can trust you. They need to see that it is fine to give 'red' because it means they will get some extra help. They might start off saying that everything is green, but gradually they will be more honest about needing support. It works best when you are working with a group of similar abilities. It's also helpful if all pupils are sometimes challenged and assess themselves as 'red'. It demonstrates that even the most able are challenged in their learning from time to time.

*Teaching assistant
working with Year 10*

they have assessed themselves. If the ethos in the classroom is such that pupils feel confident about sharing the information with other pupils, then the cards can be placed on the desk in public view. If, on the other hand, you haven't reached that stage, then less public strategies such as having the coloured disk inside the exercise book might work better.

If a pupil displays an yellow circle, you will know they require your support to overcome a potential barrier to their learning but that it may be a short intervention. A red circle might require more of your time. This can be an extremely useful way of targeting your support and ensuring that you are always working with pupils who need your help, rather than sitting with a group or individuals who don't necessarily need the support at that time.

In all of the above cases, you should agree the approach with the class teacher in advance. They will probably have come across this strategy in the AfL whole-school development materials and may be willing to try this out with the whole class. However, using traffic lights in this way takes time to establish and requires an atmosphere in the classroom that allows pupils to feel able to ask for support in the confidence that it is acceptable to make mistakes. You and the class teacher will need to judge how your pupils will respond.

Alternatives to this approach include using 'thumbs up or thumbs down', or the use of individual whiteboards to draw symbols and indicators of levels of confidence or achievement of the learning objective. The key is to remind the pupils what they are learning in the lesson and how successful they have been in achieving this.

Unit 5 of the AfL training folder ('Peer and self assessment') looks in detail at strategies for developing peer and self assessment.

Guiding learning through dialogue

The dialogue between pupils and teacher should be thoughtful, reflective, focused to evoke and explore understanding, and conducted so that all pupils have the opportunity to think and express their ideas.

Paul Black and Dylan William (1998) Inside the black box, © nferNelson used with permission.

Because you are constantly engaged in dialogue with pupils, the comment above applies to you as well as the teacher. You may be asked to work with groups of pupils to discuss problems, issues and questions together. The range of attainment and rates of progress in classes will vary greatly and your role will often entail working with a group, following whole-class teaching, to consolidate and extend knowledge, skills and understanding, and to tackle misconceptions. You have a key role in drawing out ideas and responses from pupils in the groups that you are working with and then feeding back this information to the class teacher.

‘Guided learning’ is a powerful procedure for pitching work at appropriate levels for differing groups within the class so that all pupils make progress. In a guided learning group you can support and challenge pupils by intervening at the point of learning, as pupils read, write, talk, design, make or practise. You do more than just ‘listen in’ or ‘join in’. You monitor the pupils’ responses, adjusting what you say or do and what you ask them to say or do, accordingly. It is assessment for learning in action.

You need to be able to promote thinking and learning by encouraging dialogue that helps pupils to go beyond simple answers, anecdotal comment or unsupported observations. Pupils need to think beyond the literal, expand on their ideas, justify and speculate – all higher-order skills that can be promoted through effective dialogue. The following are some examples of the good questions that you can use to promote better thinking.

Question	Cognitive function
<i>What do you think, [give pupil's name]? What is your view/opinion/idea about this?</i>	Focusing attention
<i>Why did you say that? Can you give me a reason?</i>	Reasoning
<i>What do you mean by... ? Can you say a bit more about that?</i>	Defining, analysing, clarifying
<i>How can we tell if this is true? How do you know? How do we know?</i>	Testing for truth
<i>Do you agree with [give pupil's name]? Can you tell me why?</i>	Sustaining dialogue/argument
<i>Can you remember what we have said so far? What ideas/arguments have you come up with?</i>	Recall, summarising

Just take a few seconds 'thinking time' before you tell me what you think the solution might be.

I want you to think about this for a moment, then discuss it with your partner. In two minutes, I'm going to ask for your answer.

Before you give me your first answer, just spend a few minutes thinking it through to check it's what you really want to say.

A common pitfall in group discussion is where one pupil dominates or some are reticent and unwilling to contribute. You can overcome this by doing the following.

- Having a 'no hands-up' strategy. Tell the pupils not to volunteer answers because you will ask them by name. This ensures that everyone becomes involved and pupils tend to concentrate better when they think they may be asked a question at any moment!
- Allowing 'wait time' so that pupils have a chance to think things through before they respond. Research in classrooms shows that, on average, we wait about a second for someone to answer a question before rephrasing it or answering it ourselves. Some pupils process their ideas more quickly than others. Extending 'wait time' to about three seconds allows more pupils to offer responses and ideas.

Another use of 'wait time' is to pause and reflect on a pupil's response before you respond yourself or to allow time for other pupils to reflect on the response and make their own contribution.

Another pitfall is for the adult to fall into a routine of asking all the questions. Here are some alternatives to questioning.

Alternative strategy to direct questioning	Example
Invite pupils to elaborate	<i>'Say a little more about that.'</i>
Make a personal contribution from your own experience	<i>'What I felt was...'</i>
Speculate on a given subject	<i>'I wonder what would happen if...'</i>
Make a suggestion	<i>'You could try...'</i>
Reflect on topics	<i>'Yes. I sometimes think that...'</i>
Offer information	<i>'It might be useful to know that...'</i>
Echo	<i>'So you think that...'</i>
Make a non-verbal invitation	<i>Eye contact, tilt of the head, nod and so on</i>
Increase waiting time in preparatory discussion	<i>'Don't answer for a second. Just think for a moment about...'</i>
Refer to someone else	<i>'I think [name] might agree/disagree.'</i>

Ping-pong or basketball?

It is helpful to think about the difference between 'ping-pong' dialogue and 'basketball' dialogue.

- 'Ping-pong' dialogue is when the exchanges are predominately between teacher or teaching assistant and individual pupils in the group or class.
- 'Basketball' dialogue is when the questions and responses, and sharing of ideas is between the pupils themselves in a group or class.

Both have their place, but ‘basketball’ dialogue enables pupils to build on each other’s thinking and learn together. It takes time and practice to learn how to facilitate effective dialogue.

Task 6

Developing dialogue

60 minutes

With the class teacher, plan some key questions that you will ask during group work. Give the pupils warning that they will have some ‘thinking time’, then deliberately try to extend the time you wait for an answer to three seconds.

Also plan to use some of the alternative strategies to direct questioning above.

Reflection

Did you notice any differences in pupil responses? Was the quality of their answers any different? Were ‘quieter’ pupils more involved? Were you surprised by any of the responses?

Review your responses with the class teacher after the lesson. Use the progression tables in Appendix 1 ‘Reviewing existing practice in questioning and dialogue’ to agree which stage best describes your pupils’ current responses. Plan your next steps with the class teacher.

7 out of 10. Is that good, Miss?

Miss says I’ve got to write in more detail. What’s that supposed to mean?

I only got a C. What’s the point in bothering? It took me ages.

I can’t read Sir’s handwriting. What does it say?

Giving feedback

You often have the opportunity to witness the pupils’ response to feedback from teachers, whether it is oral or written, in a way that a class teacher sometimes doesn’t. You will have seen the way that feedback can act as a powerful motivator, building confidence and giving pupils a clear idea of what they have to do next to progress. You will have also noticed the reverse and seen the way that a few words can lower the self-esteem of pupils and ensure that they will think twice about offering an answer next time. You also give feedback yourselves when working with individuals or small groups, so it is important that you recognise the importance of constructive feedback, both orally and in writing, in accelerating progress in learning.

Learners need information and guidance in order to plan the next steps in their learning. Oral and written feedback are closely interrelated and provide opportunities to identify learners’ strengths and advise on how to develop them, and to give clear and constructive advice on any weaknesses and how they might be addressed. A supportive classroom ethos is essential so that pupils feel safe to take risks – for example, by giving speculative responses to challenging questions.

Task 7

Feedback

60 minutes

Watch the Year 8 geography lesson, from the 'Working together: teaching assistants and AfL' area of the Assessment for learning DVD. Watch the TA, Lesley as she works with a group of pupils. Use Handout 4.1 to analyse her interactions.

Now use a tape recorder or video camera to capture some examples of your own practice when you are working with a small group.

Reflection

Analyse your feedback using Handout 4.1. Use the progression table in Appendix 2, 'Reviewing existing practice in oral feedback', to consider how your pupils are responding.

Identify those aspects that you would like to improve and, with the support of the class teacher, plan your next steps.

Although most teachers mark pupils' work regularly and record marks, this information is not always used constructively to inform future teaching and learning. When teachers provide pupils with written feedback that helps pupils to recognise the next steps in learning and how to take them, your role may be to make sure they act on that feedback. You may also give written feedback yourself on occasions. Your comments should always be both positive (i.e. recognising pupils' efforts and achievements to date) and developmental (i.e. offering specific details of ways forward).

Appendix 2 gives you the progression tables for the development of oral and written feedback, enabling you to review current practice and also giving you a view of what enhanced practice will look like.

Units 4.1 'Oral feedback' and 4.2 'Written feedback' in the AfL folder focus on providing informative feedback, reviewing and reflecting on assessment.

In your role as a teaching assistant you will gather assessment evidence about the pupils you work with on a daily basis. Each time you have a discussion, help a pupil with a piece of work, listen to their response to questions and witness their reaction to feedback, you are gaining valuable insights into what the pupil knows, understands and can do.

On some occasions, because you often tend to focus on a few pupils rather than the whole class, you can obtain much more detailed and informative responses than the teacher can. It is vitally important that your observations and insights are communicated to the class teacher.

Assessment for learning means *acting on the assessment information*. The class teacher may want to adapt the next lesson on the basis of the information you have given. For instance, it may be necessary to recap or revisit some points, to differentiate the work more carefully or consider differing teaching strategies in order to meet the learning needs of the pupil or pupils.

At the end of each lesson you have supported, you need to pass on to the class teacher information about how well the pupils have responded to the learning objective and how well they have achieved the learning outcomes. Schools are

James really struggled with some of this today. I think he understood the concept of global warming but I'm not sure he linked it with the work we were doing on the rainforests. He achieved the first learning objective, but I think he needs to revisit the second one.

busy places but teachers and teaching assistants who manage to establish a routine where they have a few moments discussion at the end, or towards the end, of the lesson have learned the benefits of this. It is a valuable investment of time as the teaching becomes more quickly focused on the learning needs of the pupils – and time during lessons is better spent.

Task 8

Looking for solutions

15 minutes

Watch the post-lesson discussion, from the 'Working together: teaching assistants and AfL' area of the Assessment for learning DVD where Lesley and Suzanne give each other feedback. How will their conversation help the teacher to assess the pupils and to plan the next steps in their learning?

Reflection

Consider your current situation. How often do you have the chance to provide feedback to the teacher at the end of the lesson on how well pupils have achieved in relation to the learning objectives for the lesson?

If it is not every lesson, what are the barriers to this taking place?

Consider some of the following possible solutions. Which solutions could work in your school?

- *Having a three-minute discussion at the end of the lesson.*
- *Taking a few moments' time out during group work when the pupils are setting up an activity or clearing away.*
- *Having a weekly meeting with the class teacher to discuss how things have gone.*
- *Providing the teacher with some written notes.*
- *Providing a comment from you in the pupil's book that gives feedback on how the pupil has achieved.*
- *Asking the pupil to write a comment against their work giving feedback on what they have achieved that lesson.*
- *Providing a note on the teachers' lesson plan, naming pupils who have achieved the learning objective and where others need more help.*
- *Completing an agreed proforma for each lesson, giving information about how well pupils understand what has been taught and so on.*
- *Using a traffic light system, in the teachers' register, indicating which pupils achieved the learning objective fully, partially or not at all.*

Next steps

As you reflect on your role as a teaching assistant and how you can contribute to promoting and embedding AfL, it is natural to think about the challenges you may face in your school and classrooms.

In task 1, 'Reflecting on your role', you considered your role in school. You might now like to reflect on whether your response to this task would be different now that you have worked through some of the ideas in these materials. Task 1 may have alerted you to some obstacles that were getting in the way of you developing your practice. Much time and energy can be spent looking at what's going wrong in a situation rather than finding satisfactory ways forward.

To identify the next steps you will need to think about the pupils you support and the classrooms you work in, and reflect on what you have achieved as you have worked through these materials.

Changing problems into goals

An approach which focuses on solutions is one that builds on your existing strengths, skills and successes, helping you to change problems into goals. It is not productive to dwell on the problem or barriers to success; instead, look ahead to the future. Consider some of the problems you have encountered in establishing specific techniques for assessment for learning and translate them into what you want to happen in the future. You can use the progression tables in the appendices to help you with this.

Turning problems into goals encourages reflection on the strengths and skills required to move in small steps towards these goals.

Goals should be framed in a way that means they can be acted on straight away. You should aim to build on existing skills and break down what you plan to do into a series of small steps. Task 9, 'Progression in assessment for learning', takes you through an example of how you might achieve this.

Task 9

Progression in assessment for learning

20 minutes

Problem:

Pupils in Year 8 lessons do not engage in peer and self assessment.

'Scaling' is a technique that can be used to address and analyse a problem by setting a goal and providing a series of achievable steps.

Using the progression tables in the appendices, consider how you might move the pupils' response from non-engagement to the characteristics of 'enhancing'.

Identify some small steps that would help the pupils to progress and plan a strategy for moving towards this goal.

If you have worked through these materials successfully you will have worked collaboratively with at least one class teacher and will have developed your skills in establishing, embedding and promoting good assessment practice.

By using the 'scaling' strategy you can reflect on your strengths, future goals and the steps needed to get there. In many ways, this approach mirrors some aspects of assessment for learning in that you need to identify where you are now, where you want to be, what it looks like and what steps are required to get there. The following suggestions may be helpful.

- Ensure you are involved in the whole-school development of assessment for learning, and that you are kept informed of particular departmental focuses and progress with the AfL units' 'subject development materials'.
- If a lot of your responses to task 1, 'Reflecting on your role', were 'Not at all', seek advice from your line manager. The school may need to do more to create the conditions for your role to progress.
- Use the progression tables in the appendices to gain a view of where you could contribute to improving practice.
- If you 'started small' with one teacher and one class, now work in a similar way with other teachers and other classes.
- Find opportunities to share your successes with the rest of the staff.

You are already an important and valuable resource. You are in a unique position to support assessment for learning in the classroom, and as you continue to develop your skills your contributions to pupils' learning will continue to grow.

Appendix 1

Reviewing existing practice in objective led lessons

	Developing	Establishing	Enhancing
Pupils	<p>Most pupils, in most lessons, understand what they are trying to learn and can explain this with limited use of subject-specific language.</p> <p>Some pupils understand how they can demonstrate success but others are unclear what is expected of them.</p> <p>Some pupils understand the longer-term purpose (big picture) of what they are learning.</p>	<p>With some prompting all pupils are able to explain clearly what they are trying to learn, how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve.</p> <p>Pupils are increasingly confident in discussing the progress they are making against the learning objectives with each other and their teacher.</p> <p>Pupils, when supported, are able to recognise and improve their achievements against predetermined criteria and some are beginning to contribute to determining the criteria.</p>	<p>All pupils understand what they are trying to achieve and why, and routinely review their progress against the learning objectives for the lesson.</p> <p>Pupils are aware of a range of possible learning outcomes, and are able to determine and improve their achievements in relation to success criteria.</p> <p>Pupils are able to identify independently their achievements against criteria they have agreed collaboratively.</p>

Reviewing existing practice in peer and self assessment

	Developing	Establishing	Enhancing
Pupils	<p>Pupils are beginning to assess their own work and that of their peers against the learning objectives and learning outcomes.</p> <p>They are gaining confidence in paired and group discussion and are beginning to provide constructive feedback.</p>	<p>Pupils can use success criteria to improve their own work and that of their peers, and can recognise the standards they are aiming for in the subject.</p> <p>Pupils are increasingly confident in assessing their own work, and provide informative and constructive feedback to others.</p>	<p>Pupils can independently identify how to move their learning forward.</p> <p>Pupils are able to relate success criteria to progression in the subject.</p> <p>Pupils are able to apply an understanding of how they learn to make better progress in different contexts.</p> <p>Pupils can engage in extended and focused dialogue about their learning.</p>

Reviewing existing practice in oral feedback

	Developing	Establishing	Enhancing
Pupils	<p>Most pupils expect feedback to relate to their learning, and listen to and respond to what is said.</p> <p>Most pupils know when to expect specific oral feedback, as a class, individually or in a small group setting.</p> <p>Pupils are beginning to see oral feedback as having a distinct value.</p> <p>Most pupils are able to provide useful feedback to other pupils and similarly respond to feedback from their peers.</p>	<p>Pupils recognise fully the value of oral feedback and know it is related to their learning. They listen carefully and respond appropriately.</p> <p>Pupils recognise the strategies for different types of oral feedback.</p> <p>Pupils will readily engage in focused peer feedback in relation to learning outcomes, and are beginning to develop a vocabulary to do this.</p> <p>Pupil work shows evidence of a response to oral feedback.</p>	<p>All pupils recognise that oral feedback is focused on their learning and is as important as written feedback.</p> <p>Pupils know that feedback is valuable and listen carefully to each other and their teachers. They respond to feedback to engage in dialogue about their learning.</p> <p>Pupils understand well-established strategies for group and guided work which involve feedback.</p> <p>Pupils give regular detailed oral feedback to peers and teachers related to learning objectives and outcomes.</p> <p>Pupils are clear where in their work they have improved it in response to feedback.</p>

Reviewing existing practice in written feedback

	Developing	Establishing	Enhancing
Pupils	<p>Most pupils understand that written feedback is related to the learning objectives and outcomes of the lesson.</p> <p>Most pupils in most lessons can explain what the written feedback means and can act on it.</p>	<p>All pupils know that action is expected in relation to feedback.</p> <p>All pupils routinely use written feedback to improve their work.</p> <p>Pupil work shows evidence of a response to written feedback.</p>	<p>Pupils routinely use written feedback to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of their work and to identify ways in which they can improve.</p> <p>Pupils understand how feedback relates to their longer-term goals and can set their own targets for improvement.</p> <p>Pupils are clear where in their work they have improved it in response to feedback.</p>

Reviewing existing practice in questioning and dialogue

	Developing	Establishing	Enhancing
Pupils	<p>Pupils are increasing in confidence in discussions and contribute willingly.</p> <p>Pupils' responses are more extended, show increasingly higher order thinking and their views are supported by evidence.</p> <p>During whole class discussions all pupils listen and respect the contributions of their peers.</p> <p>In group and paired discussions all pupils contribute and are beginning to learn from each other. Discussions are usually well focused.</p>	<p>All pupils regularly contribute to whole class and group discussions.</p> <p>Pupils listen carefully to each other. They respond to, and build on, what others have said.</p> <p>Pupils typically give extended responses, demonstrate high level thinking and can support their views.</p> <p>Pupils are confident to take risks by sharing partially formed thinking or challenging others in a constructive way.</p> <p>In group and paired dialogue pupils listen to and learn from each other.</p>	<p>Pupils' responses are routinely well developed, build on or are informed by the ideas of others and demonstrate high level thinking.</p> <p>Pupils are confident to initiate and build on dialogue. They don't look to the teacher to channel whole class discussion.</p> <p>Pupils are confident to take risks and challenge the ideas of others, including the teacher, in a constructive way.</p> <p>Pupils reflect on the dialogue process and know how to get the most from it.</p> <p>There is always a 'buzz' in the air during classroom dialogue.</p>

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