Welcome

Dear Colleagues,

This is our first newsletter. I would like to introduce myself first. I am Joanne Grima, Education Officer for Assessment for Learning (AfL). My work is to support Primary and Secondary schools in this aspect of teaching and learning. The section comprises five Heads of Department Primary (Assessment): Ms Doreen Said Pace, Ms Elizabeth Galea, Mr Anthony Satariano, Ms Cheryl Curmi and Ms Jennifer Borg. They support both Primary teachers and the SMT in the implementation of Assessment for Learning in the classroom. Moreover, they are available to assist college examination committees during the planning and preparation of half-yearly examination papers. The Assistant Director in charge of the AfL Section is Mr Gaetano Bugeja.

What is Assessment for Learning (AfL)?

Black and William (1998) explain that ‘assessment refers to all those activities undertaken by teachers and by their students in assessing themselves, which provide information to be used as feedback to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged.’

Assessment for Learning strategies inform the teacher where the learner stands in the learning process, what is the next step in learning, and how best to get there. The prerequisite for this is that the teacher needs to encompass the knowledge, skills and competences of the subject very well.

The basic strategies of AfL

Understanding where the learner stands in her/his learning
Sharing of clear Learning Intentions/Teaching Objectives
Sharing of clear and specific Success Criteria
Effective Questioning and providing an opportunity to think
Giving timely feedback and working upon it
Providing opportunities for Self-Assessment and Peer-Assessment

There is great flexibility with regards to what techniques to use to implement these strategies, which to use and when to use them. We will be exploring the different strategies in the coming newsletters and one can access ample amount of information on Assessment for Learning from the Assessment for Learning room on the E-Platform (Fronter).
The Afl in class support

Afl strategies help all learners of all abilities proceed and progress on the learning continuum because it is an assessment which carries as its main purport the construction and scaffolding of pupils’ learning. At present the section can offer the services of five Heads of Department. The HoDs’ programme for Primary schools which are already profiting from this support is as follows:

1. Curriculum time (1) of 45 minutes with the different year groups where one Afl strategy is discussed and various techniques on how it can feature in different lessons are explored. During curriculum time (2) the HoD and the teacher/s plan a lesson together. This lesson is taken from the teacher’s scheme of work in order not to create any disruption.
2. The HoD will give a demo lesson and the teacher is asked to observe/collaborate.
3. As an evaluative exercise, the teacher and the HoD will then discuss the techniques used and their effectiveness, during the next curriculum time.
4. Consequently, the teacher is given around three weeks to practice the strategy by embedding it in lessons using any desired technique.
5. This process is continued with the other strategies. Some strategies will require more discussions and demo lessons than others.

Schools benefiting from this support are recommended to insert Assessment for Learning in their School Development Plan and therefore dedicate one of the Action Plans to this important aspect of teaching and learning. This will then lead to the formulation and development of an Assessment Policy.

The Primary Schools that have embarked on this journey of professional development

| Maria Regina College Għargħur Primary | St Benedict College Għaxaq Primary |
| Maria Regina College Mellieha Primary | St Benedict College Zurrieq Primary |
| Maria Regina College Mosta Primary B | St Benedict College Kirkop Primary |
| Maria Regina College Naxxar Primary | St Benedict College Mqabba Primary |
| Maria Regina College St Paul’s Bay Primary | St Benedict College Qrendi Primary |
| San Ġorg Preca College Marsa Primary | St Benedict College Safi Primary |
| San Ġorg Preca College Pietà Primary | St Ignatius College Qormi San Ġorġ Primary |
| St Margaret College Kalkara Primary | St Ignatius College Siggiewi Primary |
| St Margaret College Vittoriosa Primary | St Nicholas College Bahrija Primary |
| St Thomas More College Ġejtun Primary A | St Nicholas College Mtarfa Primary |
| St Thomas More College Fgura Primary A |

St Theresa College has organised six Afl sessions delivered by Ms Geraldine Vella, for all the SMT in both Primary and Secondary Schools. St Nicholas College has also organised a session on Afl for SMT and HoDs in the Secondary schools.

With regards to Secondary Schools, St Margaret College Bormla Girls’ Secondary and St Nicholas College Rabat Girls’ Secondary are presently organising subject meetings within which Assessment for Learning strategies are discussed in relation to the lessons and the classroom reality.
The Assessment for Learning room on the E-Platform (Fronter) can be found in the Educational Entities’ Room. It includes information on Assessment for Learning through presentations, publications and articles. It encompasses videos and online e-books. The Heads of Department are also regularly uploading the lesson plans and resources they are preparing for their demo lessons. Such lessons can be used and modified according to the needs of the teacher and the different abilities of the learners. The room offers links to other important sites of great exponents in this area, like Dylan Wiliam, Shirley Clarke and Anne Davies. There is also the possibility to ask questions in an open Forum and these will be answered by our team. Apart from the strategies, the Room provides the information with regards to the formulation of an Assessment Policy. The Room also provides space to expose good practice and gives the opportunity to others to be informed and maybe emulate.

Assessment for learning and Assessment of Learning

The DQSE has brought together the two sections, ensuring that Assessment is recognised as being one whole component. Both aspects of assessment provide valid information that can be used to enhance learning. They cannot be considered separately. The contributions that Assessment for Learning does to learning will manifest themselves in summative assessments. The process of learning and the assessment that should accompany the teaching path will provide evidence that can be employed in providing the scaffolding instructions required to close the gap in learning for the individual learner and also to become aware of the level of attainment of that same individual. It is therefore implicit that both aspects of assessment have different purposes and these will be explored further in the coming issues.

References