‘A strong sense of efficacy enhances human accomplishment and personal well-being in many ways. People with high assurance in their capabilities approach difficult tasks as challenges to be mastered rather than as threats to be avoided—They set themselves challenging goals and maintain strong commitment to them, becoming deeply engrossed in learning, and heightening and sustaining their efforts in the face of failure. (Bandura, 1994, p.71)

Time flies!

Dear Colleagues,

I started off this newsletter with a quotation by Bandura about efficacy because every individual should be given the opportunity to develop this characteristic. I came across a picture showing a cat looking into a mirror which reflected the image of a lion instead of that of a cat. This made me think. What does every learner see when she/he looks into the mirror? Is the mirror reflecting the image of a failure or of a person who believes that with the right instructions, she/he can do anything? Perceiving achievement helps the learner understand that she/he is capable of moving ahead in the learning continuum. This is possible if the learners are taught how to use the right tools to be able to drive their learning forward.
CLEAR AND SHARED SUCCESS CRITERIA
Anthony Satariano - Head of Department Primary (Assessment)

In our last issue we had discussed the importance of sharing the learning intention of the lesson. We had discussed how learners can significantly benefit if the learning intention is clear, explained to the learners and written down either on the whiteboard or anywhere the teacher decides is best. In this issue we shall be discussing the next step that is how learners will know that they have achieved the learning intention. This can be possible through the sharing of clear success criteria which are the driving force of learning.

Success Criteria (SC) are the key steps that the learner needs in order to fulfil the learning intention. Learners use SC to understand where they stand during a task and to be in a position to ask the right questions that will take them to the next step in learning. SC describe what good looks like, and allow the teacher and learner to gather information about the quality of the learning that is taking place. The use of these criteria shifts the responsibility of learning from the teacher to the learner. However this cannot take place unless we provide our learners with the appropriate tools.

Clear success criteria are most effective when learners are involved in co-constructing them. This is because they can more effectively access criteria that they have generated themselves, and often with greater commitment too. The co-constructing of success criteria:

- makes the success criteria explicit for teachers and learners alike;
- helps the teacher during the planning phase;
- builds a common understanding of success;
- assists during feedback;
- promotes self and peer assessment;
- leads to individual goal setting hence assisting in differentiation;
- empowers learners to take ownership of their learning;
- challenges learners to internalize the criteria;
- helps learners develop independent learning skills.

PRODUCT SUCCESS CRITERIA AND PROCESS SUCCESS CRITERIA
Teachers commonly use product success criteria which focus on end points or products. They are what the teacher wants and do not indicate for the learners how the learning intention will be fulfilled. They give you the feeling of ‘I’ll know it when I see it.’ Process success criteria are more detailed, task specific success criteria that guide learners whilst they are engaged in learning. Process criteria summarise the key steps and/or knowledge that the learner needs to reach the learning intention.

DEVELOPING SUCCESS CRITERIA
Take the learning intention of the specific lesson and ask yourself how the learners will show you that they will reach it. Your response (the success criteria) has to be disclosed or co-constructed with the learners. These criteria should then be written down on the board. This will assist learners to understand where they have difficulties when they compare what they have achieved against the listed success criteria. Learners need to realise when they have reached the aim of the lesson.
SUCCESS CRITERIA CHECKLISTS
Success criteria (process) checklists organize the steps learners should take to complete a particular task. These checklists can be used by the teacher to record information during assessment about student performance and to inform instruction or provide evidence on which to base evaluation.

I used the checklist below with a Year 6 class during a writing activity where learners had to write a dialogue. I could effectively go round the class and capture and catalogue where the learners stood in their learning. The evidence gathered was later shown to the teacher so that she could act upon it in order to improve student learning.

Teachers can also provide success criteria checklists to learners who can record themselves their performance after a task. However, it is recommended that learners are given the checklist before they start the task so that they can be able to refer to it as often as needed. SC checklists, not only foster independent learning, but also give the learners the opportunity to assess their work and that of their peers. The checklist beneath was used during another writing activity where learners were learning how to write an email.
During the third term, the following schools have started to avail themselves of the support given by the Assessment for Learning Unit: St. Ignatius College, Żebbuġ Primary and Qormi San Bastjan Primary; St. Theresa College, Msida Primary and San Ġorġ Preca College, Valletta Primary.

These schools and all those that were mentioned in the previous issue are benefiting from teacher learning communities during curriculum development sessions where pedagogical strategies that enhance learning through assessment are discussed. Moreover, the Heads of Department together with the teachers plan lessons, which are then used to demonstrate how assessment for learning can be embedded in everyday lessons.

Professional Development sessions were held at the following state and church schools; St. Clare College, Sliema Primary; St. Margaret College, Vittoriosa Primary; St. Benedict College, Mqabba, Ghaxaq and Gudja Primary Schools, St. Joseph Sliema Senior School; St. Elias College; St. Albert the Great College; St. Francis School. Other PD sessions were held with Maltese teachers who teach the Core Curriculum Support Programme and with Kindergarten Assistants.

SDP sessions were held at St. Clare College, San Ġwann B Primary; St. Nicholas College, Mtarfa Primary; Maria Regina College, Mellieha Primary and Naxxar Primary; St. Thomas More College, Żejtun A Primary; St. Ignatius College, Qormi San Ġorġ Primary; St. Margaret College, Bormla GSS; St. Benedict College, Safi Primary; San Andrea School. An SDP session was also held with the e-Learning support teachers.

Workshop sessions were held with Let Me Learn participants and with teachers attending the 13th Invitational Writing Institute. Meetings were held with Maltese and Maths teachers from St. Clare College, Pembroke Secondary; teachers from Maria Regina College, Wardija Resources Centre and with the AFL Action Committee at St. Ignatius College, Handaq GSS.

We thank Mr. David Muscat EO Maltese for his continuous professional development of the AFL HODs.
Writing is amongst the most complex human activity. Learning how to write well means learning how to communicate your ideas effectively. The fact that there are different genres makes writing even more challenging. Thus, writing needs to be a key learning activity in the classroom.

A lesson exemplar in a Year 6 class:

One of the genres included in the current Maltese Primary Syllabus is article writing. Learners in a Year 6 class had to write an article for a children’s newspaper about Christmas traditions. The theme selected was Christmas, so this genre was closely linked with Religion as this theme forms part of the Religion syllabus.

One of the AFL strategies is ‘Understanding where the learners stand in their learning’. So at the beginning of the lesson, learners were shown three different genres: a notice, an article and a recount. Learners were divided into groups of three and they had to identify the article explaining the reason for their choice. In the meantime the teacher went round and listened to what was being discussed.

Next, the learning intention was shared and written down – ‘Today we are learning to write an article’. Learners were asked the following questions and a discussion ensued:

**What is the purpose of article writing? Where can articles be published? Where would you prefer to publish an article so that it can be read by a greater audience?**

Learners were given a very good model of an article and another example of an article which had a lot of features that were missing. Each group had to analyse both articles and decide which one is best and why. Therefore, learners had to come up with features of a good article. Afterwards, every group shared what had been discussed and the success criteria of writing an article were elicited and written on the whiteboard.

Then, the prompt was shared and a short discussion about the audience, purpose and voice of writing ensued. Soon after, learners started planning their writing. Learners worked in a workshop setting where everyone worked independently on the various stages of the writing process. In the meantime, the teacher went round having one-to-one conferences with the learners and giving quality oral feedback and prompts to help learners reach the intention of this lesson.
Learners had to decide on a catchy title that would hook their readers. They had to think of a general introduction about the traditions of Christmas. They had to divide their article in different paragraphs and write in the third person, in the present tense. Learners also had to include a picture and write a caption underneath.

When learners finished their draft, they checked whether they had included all the features of article writing against the success criteria. Learners were given oral feedback and they had time to revise their writing. Learners also edited their writing for punctuation and for the tense used.

At the end of the lesson, some of the learners shared their article. The others listened carefully because they were asked to give specific positive feedback about what they liked most about the article just read to them.
While visiting schools that I give support to, I am really glad to see colleagues who are trying to implement Assessment for Learning strategies. I also feel a sense of satisfaction when I am asked to discuss the strategies and techniques which the teachers have been trying to implement. These dedicated teachers share their lesson plans and resources with me and demonstrate how Assessment for Learning techniques have been well integrated. It is a pleasure to work with colleagues who are very well focused on the learners!

The following are a number of testimonials from teachers, whom I have been working with for the past months. They wanted to confirm that AFL strategies certainly make a difference in learning.

Consequently, I have to thank Ms. C. Chircop, Year 4 teacher at St. Ignatius College, Siġġiewi Primary School, for sharing her valuable experience of using Learning Intentions in her classroom together with her positive experience abroad. A big thanks goes also to Ms S. Vella, Year 1 teacher at St. Ġorġ Preca College, Marsa Primary School, with whom I really enjoyed planning a lesson incorporating AFL strategies and then co-teaching the same lesson. Last but not least, a big thanks goes also to Ms V. Vassallo, Year 3 teacher at St. Margaret College, Kalkara Primary School, who shared with us her opinion on the importance of some of the AFL strategies.

**TESTIMONIAL 1 - MS C. CHIRCOP, YEAR 4 TEACHER - ST. IGNATIUS COLLEGE, SIĠġIEWI PRIMARY**

During one of the curriculum sessions we had during the last scholastic year by one of the HOD’s from the Assessment Unit, I’ve learnt about the importance of presenting the learners with a Learning Intention in each and every lesson. The first thing learners need to know is what they’re supposed to be learning. Since then I have not stopped using this approach. No matter what I decide the learners should learn during a lesson, I have discovered that learners will benefit more when they understand what they are supposed to learn during the lesson and set their sights on learning it. Like this I’ve also found that the learners can focus more on what they are learning rather than on what their teacher is saying. I’ve also had the pleasure to see this approach put into practice during one of the school visits I have had in London at Scargill Primary School. Teachers there also believe in providing their learners with clear objectives at the start of each lesson, making it visible and providing constant reminders and feedback to help them achieve their goals.
TESTIMONIAL 2 - MS S. VELLA YEAR 1 TEACHER - SAN ĠORĠ PRECA COLLEGE, MARSA PRIMARY

During the last scholastic year I had the chance to be supported by Ms. E. Galea our school’s Afl HOD. This year we continued working on new strategies and this term, after planning a lesson together, we co-taught a Maths lesson to my Year 1 class. The Learning Intention was ‘Addition of Doubles’ and we also used the term ‘Twin numbers’.

After brainstorming and evaluating where the learners stand in their learning, we used mini-boards to assess their individual level of understanding. Afterwards, we made use of the ‘Traffic lights’ cards, which were available for each learner. These are simple laminated cards with a green circle on one side (I understand) and a red circle on the other (I need further help). We prepared various resources to present the lesson like powerpoints, mp4s and picture/numerical cards. These were all essential aids and enhanced learning. To obtain written evidence, Ms. Galea also prepared worksheets which learners worked out in class, while I formulated a handout for homework, in which they had an extra challenging sum; double of 0, i.e. $0 + 0 = 0$. The aim and objective of the lesson was reached positively and the strategies used were of great help for a constructive end result.

Personally I still need to further practice the ‘No hands up’ technique during questioning, as old habits do tend to die hard!

On a side note, I would like to share a quote I read just recently: ‘Question what you do not know, for such is the path of learning, but do not reject what is not yet understood, for that is the way of foolishness.’ (from Ties of Love)

TESTIMONIAL 3 - MS V. VASSALLO YEAR 3 - ST. MARGARET COLLEGE, KALKARA PRIMARY

With Afl strategies learners understand more and lessons are appealing to them as they listen, understand and enjoy various activities. Various visual aids which can be used are video clips, flashcards and graded worksheets.

If I had to describe the importance of the strategy ‘Understanding where the learners stand in their learning’, I would say that with it I will know where learners stand in their learning from the beginning of the lesson and I can act accordingly.

When it comes to the Learning Intention strategy, I can add, that it is surely necessary to remind learners very often of it, especially with young learners in my class. With the Learning Intention they stay focused throughout the whole lesson.

Finally, I can say that I find open-ended questions really important to challenge the learners’ thinking skills. I try to make use of the latter in every lesson I deliver. For example when reading a story I like to ask questions like: What did you like best about the story? Why? and How do you think did they feel? Why? or How do you know? Regarding success criteria, I like to use coloured flashcards with few words but with pictures to help learners evaluate whether they were successful at the end of the lesson.
A Final Note

When a teacher teaches, no matter how well he or she might design a lesson, what a child learns is unpredictable. Children do not always learn what we teach. That is why the most important assessment does not happen at the end of learning – it happens during the learning, when there is still time to do something with the information.

Anyone who would like to share experiences or has any feedback to give us with regards to this newsletter kindly contact Ms. Joanne Grima, EO Assessment for Learning on; joanne-rita.grima@ilearn.edu.mt.