Assessment for learning and VET Practitioners and Learners

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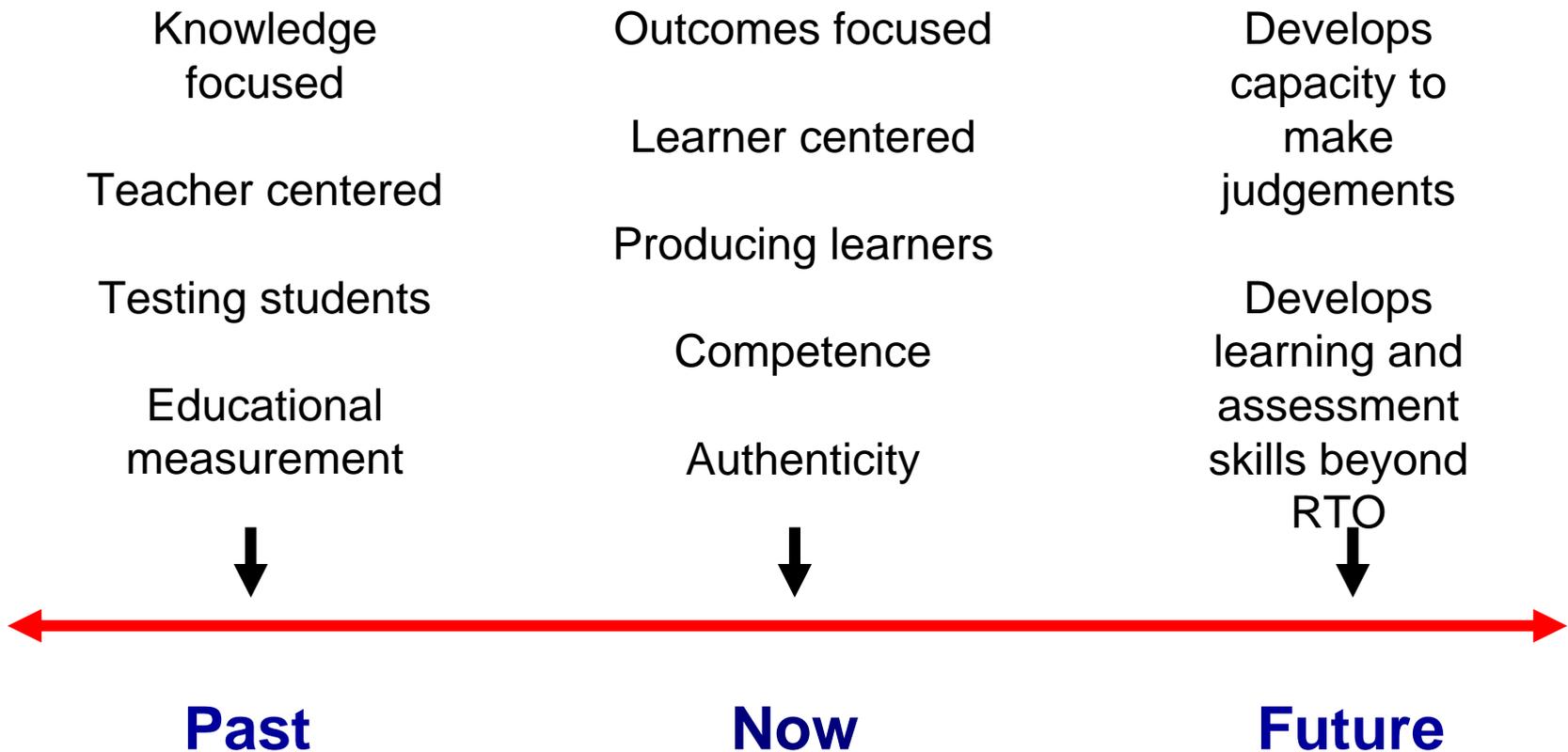
Learning Australia Pty Ltd

Purpose

- Changing nature and purpose of assessment
- Assessment for learning
- Relevance of assessment for learning for all VET learners

Changing emphasis in assessment

| Past	Now	Future
Knowledge focused	Outcomes focused	Develops capacity to make judgements
Teacher centered	Learner centered	
Testing students	Producing learners	Develops learning and assessment skills beyond RTO
Educational measurement	Competence	
	Authenticity	

Past **Now** **Future**

Assessment for learning

Assessment for learning focuses on the gap between where learners are in their learning, and where they need to be.

Learners improve most if they understand:

- ☐ the competency to be achieved,

- ☐ where they are in relation to the required level of performance

- ☐ how they can achieve the required level of performance.

It is about 'working in the gap' between what learners know and can do and what they are required to know and be able to do.
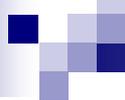
The Black Box

Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam, *Inside the Black Box* - 1998

Improving learning through assessment depends on five simple factors:

1. Providing effective feedback to students.

2. Learners' active involvement in their own learning.

3. Adjusting teaching to take account of the results of assessment.

4. Recognising the influence of assessment on learners' motivation and self-esteem.

5. Ensuring learners assess themselves and understand how to improve.

Evidence – Black and Wiliam

Range of typical performance enhancements in 'assessment for learning' groups

Performance range in control groups

Low   **High**

Performance range in Assessment for Learning groups

Low   **High**
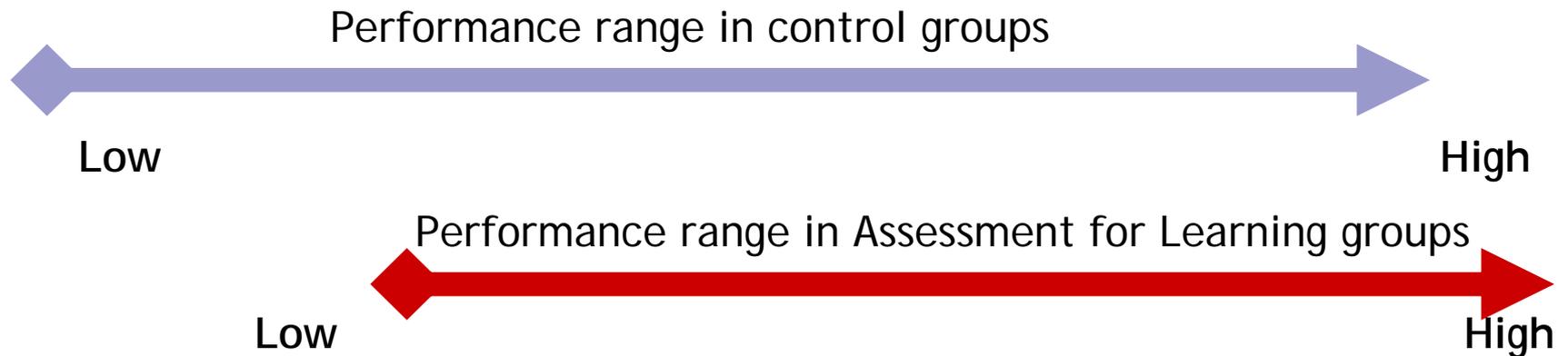
Average effect size: 25% shift in
performance compared to control groups
after 2.5 years, and a reduced 'spread'
in the performance range.

Source: Black and Wiliam (1998)

Research on assessment for learning in VET

- Lack of a research base
- Policy and practice in formative assessment driven by concerns about learner motivation, engagement and inclusion.
- Connection between formative assessment and learner performance not adequately explored in VET.
- Some recent work – Davies and Ecclestone 2008
- Different views of formative assessment in VET
  - 'instrumental'- teacher led techniques for feedback, diagnosis and review
  - 'sustainable formative assessment' - also requires trainers to modify training to meet the needs of learners and improve learning.

Assessment of and for learning

Assessment of learning	Assessment for learning
Occurs after the learning	Occurs during the learning
Done to learners	Done with learners
Measures learning	Improves learning
Prove learning	Grows learning
Outcome focused	Process focused
Looks back on past learning	Looks forward to the next stage of learning

# Questions asked about learning by VET Practitioners and learners

Assessment of learning	Assessment for learning
How good am I at this task?	How have I progressed?
Is she competent?	What difficulties is she still having?
How can I tell if she is competent?	How can I adapt my program to help him develop that skill?

Learners' response

- Assessment is used evaluate a person's learning, learners are more likely to:
  - ☐ hide what they don't know,
  - ☐ always look for the right answer, and
  - ☐ want to know where they rank in the group.

- Assessment is used to help learners improve their learning, they are more likely to
  - ☐ be honest about what they don't know,
  - ☐ be open to ideas,
  - ☐ focus on assessors' comments, and
  - ☐ compare their current and past performance.

Source: Black and Wiliam (1998)

Teachers' response

- Assessment is used to evaluate teachers' teaching, teachers are more likely to:
  - ☐ attach a level to learner performance,
  - ☐ rely on formal documented evidence in making assessment decisions, and
  - ☐ be concerned how well learners have performed in relation to other groups of learners.

- Assessment is used to improve teaching, teachers are more likely to:
  - ☐ work out how to help a learner improve,
  - ☐ use formal and informal evidence in making assessment decisions, and
  - ☐ focus on improving learners' difficulties rather than performance relative to others.

Source: Black and Wiliam (1998)
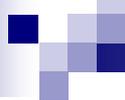
Five key strategies …

Sharing Learning Expectations

Clarifying and sharing learning intentions and criteria for success

Questioning

Engineering effective discussion, questions, and learning tasks

Feedback

Moving learners forward with feedback

Self Assessment

Activating learners as the owners of their own learning

Peer Assessment

Activating learners as instructional resources for one another

…and one big idea.

- Use evidence about learning to adapt instruction to meet learner needs.

Clarifying learning intentions

- Low achievement is often a result of learners failing to understand what is required of them.

- Assessment criteria should be made transparent to learners.

- Trainers / assessors often address this by providing a copy of the relevant competency standard.

- Standards are not written in learner friendly language.

- Learners need to build 'guild knowledge' – knowledge of what constitutes good practice eg: through being provided with and encouraged to analyse work samples.
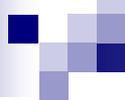
Guild knowledge

Sadler argues that teachers / assessors have a sense of what it means to be very good at something and translate this "guild knowledge" into everything they assess. Their assessments mirror how closely learners approximate what it means to be good at that particular thing. In formative assessment, teachers encourage learners, through peer assessment and other techniques, to enter the guild.

Sadler, R. (1989). Formative assessment and the design of instructional systems. *Instructional Science, 18*(2), 119-144.
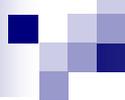
Questioning

- Effective questioning
  - identifies where learners are currently in their learning
  - expands and deepens learning
  - informs planning for future learning
  - cause thinking.

- Improving teacher questioning
  - generating questions with colleagues and specialists
  - closed v open
  - low-order v high-order
  - sequence
  - appropriate wait-time – before / after learner response

What does the research say?

- Questioning is probably the most used (and misused) instructional method.

- On average, 40% of a teacher's instructional time is spent asking questions

- Most questions do not prompt students to think

- Research shows that in general…
  - 47% managerial
  - 43% informational
  - 10% higher-order

Increase wait time

Researchers on questioning strategies speak of two kinds of wait-time:

- Wait-Time 1 - refers to the amount of time the trainer allows to elapse after he/she has posed a question and before a learner begins to speak.

- Wait-Time 2 - refers to the amount of time the trainer waits after a learner has stopped speaking before saying anything.
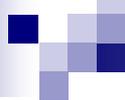
Feedback

'Feedback to any pupil should be about the particular qualities of his or her work, with advice on what he or she can do to improve, and should avoid comparisons with other pupils.'

- Inside the Black Box Black & Wiliam 1998

- Feedback needs to stimulate thinking.
- Feedback should identify what has been done well and what still needs improvement and give guidance on how to make that improvement.
- Opportunities for learners to respond to feedback should be planned as part of the overall learning process.

Components of quality feedback

Feedback should provide:

evidence on where they are now

the desired goal
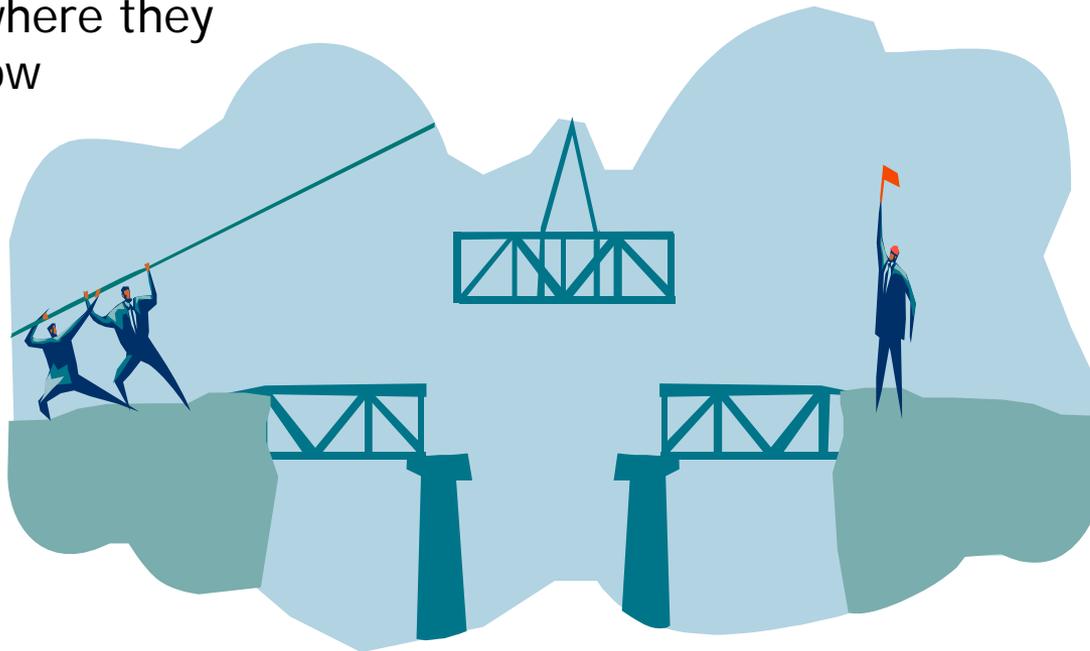
some understanding of how to close the gap

A strategy for improving feedback

- Find **two successes** in the learner's work against the unit of competency.

- Then identify **one area of the work** that the learner can immediately improve. This might not be the 'worst' aspect of his or her work. You should identify an **achievable** and **realistic** goal.

- Tell or show the learner exactly what to do to this part of his or her work. A **prompt** is a practical strategy to close the gap.

- Provide time for the learner to consider and respond to your prompt.

Prompts for improvement

- **A reminder prompt**

  'Provide two reasons for greeting customers in a friendly way.'

- **A scaffold prompt** - scaffolds the learning for those who need more support than a simple reminder.

  'Can you describe why a micrometer would be the correct piece of equipment to use?'

- **An example prompt**

  'Choose one of these or your own: 'Safety is important because it reduces accidents' or 'Companies with strong safety policies are often more profitable'

Comment-only feedback is the best way to help learners improve

Groups of pupils given:	Improvement in Work	Interest in Subject
Marks/grades only	**Nil**	+ for high attainers - for middle/low
Marks/grades + comments	**Nil**	+ for high attainers - for middle/low
Comments only	**30%**	+ for all groups

Research findings, Black & Wiliam, 1998

Self and peer assessment

- Learners should be able to recognise success in their own and others' work and to focus on *how* they are learning, *what* they are learning and *how* they can improve.

Benefits - what does the research say?

- Promotes active engagement (Butler & Winne, 1995)
- Developing students' understanding of standards and criteria is an indispensable condition for enhancing students academic performance (Sadler, 1989; Sadler, 2008)
- Can receive more feedback from peers and more quickly (Gibbs,1999; Holmes, 1995)
- Can develop and extend student discipline-specific learning through a process of explanation and articulation (Falchikov, 2001; Liu & Carless, 2006)
- Increased efficiencies in staff time (Hanrahan & Issacs, 2001)

Problems - what does the research say?

- Questions about reliability - Students make reasonably reliable judgements (Falchikov & Goldfinch,2000; Stefani, 1998)
- Students feel uncomfortable awarding grades (Sluijsmans et al, 2001)
- Lack of perceived expertise (Cheng & Warren,2003)
- Disrupts power relations (Brew, 1999)
- Discomfort in grading friends and peers too harshly (Isaacs, 2001)
- Friendship marking (Brown & Knight, 1994)

Roles in assessment for learning

|	Where the learner is going	Where the learner is	How to get there
VET professional	Clarify learning intentions	Engineering effective discussions	Providing feedback that moves learners on
Peer	Understand/ clarify criteria for success	Learners are an instructional resources for one another	
Learner	Understand criteria for success	Learners are owners of their own learning	

Assessment for learning and international learners

- Feedback was the most favoured formative assessment method by the ESOL students because they could find out what they had done correctly and where they had gone wrong.
- Questioning was not liked, due to [1] language barrier, [2] the way teachers asked questions (i.e. no wait-time), and [3] cultural sensitivity (i.e. not wanting to draw attention to oneself).

- Self-assessment was liked and found to be useful by some participants.
- Peer assessment was not liked because of the students' mistrust of their peers' ability to mark their work correctly.
- Sharing learning intentions was regarded as an important way to enhance learning as long as teachers provided clear explanations.

[Feng 2007 – New Zealand]

Learners with disabilities

- Little research on assessment for learning on the performance of learners with disabilities.
- European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education in 2007, report *Assessment in Inclusive Settings Key Issues for Policy and Practice.*

'…assessment for learning concerns all pupils and from an inclusive perspective there should not be any need to differentiate between pupils with or without SEN, but rather to differentiate classroom practice to meet all pupils' requirements'.
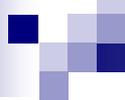
Assessment in Inclusive Settings Key Issues for Policy and Practice - 2007

- Assessment for learning should apply to all learners.
- Key difference in assessment for learners with and without special needs is the types of tools and assessment/ communication methods.

- Concern about use of assessment for learning as a tool for learners' reflection on their own learning. For learners who use alternative forms of communication this feedback process cannot operate in the 'traditional' language based way.
- Assessment approaches developed in special needs education may have relevance in mainstream settings.
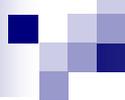
Questions to consider

- Does assessment for learning mean the same thing for VET learners with and without special needs?
- Are the assessment for learning strategies relevant to VET learners with and without special needs?
- What are the challenges and benefits that assessment for learning poses for VET Practitioners and VET learners with special needs?

Further information

Publications:

Inside the Black Box, Raising Standards Through Classroom Assessment (Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam, 1998)

Straitjacket or springboard for sustainable learning? The implications of formative assessment practices in vocational learning cultures in *The Curriculum Journal*, Volume 19, No. 2 June, 2008

Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, Integrative Assessment : Balancing assessment of and assessment for learning, QAA 2007

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