

ABSTRACT

The significance of formative assessment strategies to student learning has been summed up by Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam in their review of all research data from 1988 to 1998. The potential value of a range of strategies for the effective incorporation of formative assessment in secondary English classrooms is beginning to be appreciated by teachers in New Zealand.

Formative assessment places an emphasis on effective feed-back to students, close to the time of the learning task, and it should look forward to the specific next step to improve performance.

This paper summarises the perceptions of twenty secondary English teachers from a range of secondary schools across the Massey University College of Education's catchment region.

The paper outlines the present understanding the teachers have of the following issues raised by Black and Wiliam:

- *The relationship between formative and summative teaching strategies*
- *How assessment feed-back can be distorted by 'necessary' classroom management functions*
- *The clash between 'competitive' and 'personal improvement' assessment purposes in the classroom.*

The paper will outline the nature of the gap between the perceptions held by the teachers involved in the study and their actual classroom practice and will highlight the reasons for that gap. It will also look ahead to the professional development needs arising from the gap.

1. INTRODUCTION

The data which underpins this paper was gathered at a one-day in-service course for secondary English teachers held in Palmerston North in March 1999. The 20 teachers came from a wide range of schools and had similarly wide-ranging teaching backgrounds.

The teachers spent the day discussing the significance of formative assessment in promoting effective learning. As preparation for the meeting teachers were asked to evaluate their own teaching and assessment practices, their school/departmental assessment policies and their marking routines.

During the day-long meeting, issues raised by Black and Wiliam were discussed and eight questions (based on those issues) became the focus for individual responses by the teachers.

The actual responses to the questions are included as an appendix to this paper.

The questions which were used to draw forth the summary responses were:

- What are the ways in which you understand and deal with the relationship between your formative and summative assessment roles?
- How can the predictive validity of your summative assessment compare with the external exam results of the same students?
- Marking is usually conscientious but in what ways could / should it offer guidance on how work can be improved?
- In what ways can teacher / classroom tests encourage rote and superficial learning?
- Is it typical that the giving of marks and the grading functions are over-emphasised, while the giving of useful advice and the learning function are under-emphasised?
- If assessment feed-back seems to the students to have a 'competitive' purpose (rather than a 'personal improvement' purpose) can this demotivate low attainers?
- In what ways can assessment feed-back seem to serve social and managerial functions, at the expense of the learning function?
- Does your school / departmental assessment policy foster the collection of marks to fill up records rather than to provide for the analysis of students' work to discern learning needs?

As New Zealand teachers of English have become increasingly familiar with the 'new' English curriculum and its achievement objectives, they have also had to become accountable, through planned teaching programmes based on the effective use of learning outcomes derived from those objectives. Focused teaching and assessment have provided the planning aims of most Heads of Departments, often in response to comments made in reports on schools' performance by the Education Review Office.

The Ministry of Education issued a support resource to schools – Planning and Assessment in English (1997). This book stated:

'Assessment information is collected in order to:

- *improve students' learning;*
- *report on students' progress;*
- *authenticate teachers' judgements'*
- *improve teaching and learning programmes.*

These purposes are best served when both teachers and students are involved in making assessment decisions.'

Page 59

This statement emphasises the implicit value placed on formative assessment as a strategy for fostering learning and improving teaching programmes.

As an English adviser in secondary English I visit schools regularly. I am aware that most English teachers understand the differences between formative and summative assessment.

Whether this understanding is carried through into effective teaching strategies and classroom management is less sure. There are tensions between the demands and pressures on teachers to produce 'good results' (in both internal and external examinations) on the one hand, and their own professional judgement which asks teachers to spend more time with students in order to ensure full understanding of new content on the other. These tensions reflect the new 'accountability' schools feel under pressure to respond to. School community perceptions must be maintained to a level which ensures secure school enrolments in future years. Against these pressures, the commitment to formative assessment becomes marginalised.

It was with this background in mind that the teachers involved were invited to attend the course in order to share their perceptions regarding the uses and value of formative and summative assessment in their classrooms.

2. WORKING DEFINITIONS

(For the purposes of this paper)

Current assessment practices in secondary schools are competency-based in their design. Competency-based approaches place considerable emphasis on both the formative and summative functions of assessment. The function of assessment is not just to identify competence, but also to facilitate competence. Competency-based assessment encourages learners to play an active role in their own formative assessment.

Formative assessment is on-going throughout the learning process.

Teachers assess students to monitor their progress, to diagnose their strengths and weaknesses, to provide them with effective feed-back, and to appraise the effectiveness of teaching and learning strategies. Using assessment formatively is more than taking the temperature of the learners; it informs the learning, helps improve it and organise it.

Formative assessment focuses on effective feed-back to students. It reduces the gap between what has been learned and what now needs to be learned. Feed-back which compares students with other students is less useful in promoting learning than feed-back related to a student's achievement of the task requirements. It should also look forward to the specific next step to improve performance, perhaps through the use of alternative strategies.

Summative assessment makes a final judgement about student learning. It records and reports an achievement, indicates an acquired standard and it may bestow an award or credential. It is a summary of the learning outcomes, coming at the end of a learning process.

3. TEACHER RESPONSES TO THE QUESTIONS ABOUT FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

The eight questions which were the focus for the teachers' thinking about their use of formative assessment as a classroom strategy were designed to offer a picture of both perception and practice.

I have already stated that the teachers involved in the study shared a general awareness of the main distinctions between summative and formative assessment. Variations in this awareness come through in their responses, as do variations in the use of formative assessment as a regular classroom strategy.

After each of the questions which follow I have selected a response or two to highlight the spectrum of those responses. Comment on the responses comes after each question. (The appendix to the paper comprises the full set of responses).

1. What are the ways in which you understand and deal with the relationship between your formative and summative assessment roles?

As I stated in the introduction to this paper there was a general level of understanding of the differences between the two assessment roles. All the teachers involved understood the respective theoretical place of each type of assessment within the teaching and learning process:

- Formative (assessment) is about **pupils** actively learning and progressing and monitoring themselves. Summative is about the **teacher** monitoring pupils' progress.
- Formative is included in the teaching process as opposed to the final summative assessment which is commented upon and graded.

Most of the responses revealed similar levels of understanding as the ones quoted above, but only a small percentage spelt out how they 'dealt with' the relationship in terms of the practicalities of classroom management:

- I have been dealing with formative assessment largely in the form of teacher conferencing – on an individual basis, reading through work completed so far and offering my comments and suggestions on how it could be improved. Formative assessment goes on at the draft stage of work. (Small classes enable me to employ this style).

COMMENT

The responses, in total, revealed a good theoretical understanding of the different uses for formative and summative assessment. Formative assessment was seen, variously, as 'user friendly check points linking teaching and learning, and, it encourages student involvement in learning.' Summative assessment was recognised as the measuring of achievement at the end of a task.

One teacher commented on the increasing use of formative assessment, within group work, through peer and self assessment.

Another referred to the use of conferencing with individual students and the use of comments on drafts as bases for formative approaches. The same teacher indicated that the use of these strategies was only possible because of small classes.

This last point highlights the tension between the realities of the classroom situation and the need to utilise strategies which helps maximise student learning. It is not only class size

which is a factor influencing teachers' commitment to the use of 'time-consuming' strategies such as those upon which formative assessment rests. Secondary school time-tabling, which only permits class contact for (approximately) one hour several times a week also impinges on teachers' willingness to spend time on, say, conferencing as an aid to student learning. Highly structured curriculum delivery usually imposes similar time constraints on teachers in a way which precludes maximising formative assessment strategies throughout any particular unit of work.

2. How does the predictive validity of your summative assessments compare with the external exam results of the same students?

Teachers are clear about the close links between their internal school summative assessments and the external examination results relevant to the same students (in Years 11 and 13).

- Because we mainly 'teach to the exams'.
- If your summative assessments are linked to exam answer requirements, then the predictive validity is high.

There are also a clearly stated pressure on teachers to respond to the demands of the 'high stakes' examination demands – even if it involves a mistaken belief that their own exams are a type of formative assessment.

- I tend to mark hard and students tend to do better in the external exam. I use external exams as a type of formative assessment so that they can see where they need to improve for the external exams.

COMMENT

The teachers, in recognising the high predictive validity of their own students examination results (vis a vis external exam results), clearly indicated the influence of the external summative assessments. School exams tend to prepare students for external exams, in that they replicate the external examination situation in both the constraints of time and in the scope of content mastery essential to success in these examinations.

The internal school examinations also serve a managerial role in that poor results can be harnessed by teachers as a 'wake-up' call to students who have not achieved well.

In general, the teachers involved in the study showed that they were often able to predict students' results in external exams, but at the same time they either did not know, or did not spend the time in class meeting the learning needs of all their students.

As teachers gain in experience at teaching examination classes, they get more efficient in 'training' their students to meet these demands. The external examiners reports on how students answered the examination questions is a further 'guide' to successful summative assessment. These guides are poor models for the use of formative assessment as an aid to learning.

3. Marking is usually conscientious but in what ways could / should it offer guidance on how work can be improved?

Most of the teachers recognised the value of using marking as a basis for helping students improve their work. They did this through criteria-based marking and focused commenting on student work.

- A strength needs to be identified before constructive suggestions for improvement are offered. These suggestions should relate to criteria that the student is already aware of.
- Comments should relate to:
 1. What you like.
 2. What can be improved – restricted to one or two suggestions only, in terms that can be understood by the student.

The reality of pressures on teachers' time is referred to:

- Should indicate what has been done well and also indicate areas to improve – with suggestions provided. Often time and opportunity preclude this, unfortunately.

COMMENT

The teachers comments focused on the use of criteria, known by the students, as an aid to effective marking. They also suggested that individual conferencing is a help (if time allows), as well as stressing the need for reinforcement of learning in the classroom by means of modelling and going over weaknesses.

It was clear from discussion that many of the teachers felt guilty about marking to set criteria – they felt that other 'errors' should be marked as well. They recognised that 'over-marking' can reinforce underachievement. They also revealed in discussion that they do not utilise their knowledge of student strengths and weaknesses as a basis for on-going planning of their own programmes.

Marking is rarely used, on a teacher / student basis, as an inter-active basis for improving learning.

4. In what ways can teacher / classroom tests encourage rote and superficial learning?

The teacher responses, in a variety of ways, again reflect the tension that exists between teaching for learning and teaching for 'high-stakes' assessment. They comment on a range of 'diversions' away from the underlying principles of effective teaching and learning when testing is used in a non-formative way.

- Because they learn to 'spout out' for a test and promptly forget because they probably haven't understood the concepts in the first place.
- When the marks are more important than the learning.
- By encouraging 'getting it right' rather than understanding the underlying processes involved.
- Drilling them to supply finite 'marker-happy' answers.
- Be telling students 'write this down it will be tested' – used as a discipline tool. It is learnt - but probably not retained for more than 24 hours – because students do not see its true value – only as a means to an end – to gain a good test result.

COMMENT

Preparation for external examinations dominated the discussion about this question. Except for the first two years of secondary schooling (and in some schools not even at these stages) internal examinations and tests are regarded as vital preparation for the School Certificate (Year 11) and Bursary (Year 13) examinations.

Teachers mentioned that when concepts were 'provided', without application to contexts, there was no guarantee of real learning by students. Similarly, content-based teaching, again 'provided' for the students, because teachers guessed it was going to be examined, did not ensure meaningful learning.

If a teacher 'sign-posted' the learning for examinations by clearly indicating to students that 'this is what you have to say / think / do' (in order to score well), the managerial role of assessment comes to the fore.

As one teacher stated – it all depends on your philosophy about education.

It was clear from the discussion that even when teachers stated that their main teaching aim was to promote student understanding, their assessment practices tended to place far greater value on summative, rather than formative processes. This inconsistency was not worked at by many of the teachers involved – they cited the 'pressures of time' and 'school ethos' as reasons.

5. Is it typical that the giving of marks and the grading functions are over-emphasised, while the giving of useful advice and the learning function are under-emphasised?

Teacher responses to this question, more than to any other, reflected the tension between teaching for learning and teaching for examinations. Social, political and educational factors were raised by teachers in their responses::

- Yes, because society is competitive and multi-classed, and our education system reflects this reality.

- In a largely externally assessed secondary education system, grading and marks, through tests and exams, are an expectation which the community of employers, parents and the student themselves demand. Whether this is over-emphasised is as much a political consideration as an educational one.
- Yes – I believe students are most concerned with ‘What did I get?’ rather than ‘What can(t) I do?’ or ‘What do I need to improve?’

COMMENT

If a school ethos is examination oriented and the political commitment within the school tends towards external assessment (of teachers as well as students) formative assessment becomes marginalised. As one teacher stated, in schools such as this students tend to ‘demand’ a grade by way of evaluating their own relative class position. Useful advice tends to be ignored when marks command all the respect of students.

The obverse side of the coin which favours assessment as a managerial tool reveals the value placed by the school on grades and marks. In this situation it is hard for teachers to convince students of the value of formative assessment.

Teachers felt that in junior classes (Years 9 and 10) there is more scope for the use of formative approaches through peer and self assessment. But even this factor depends on individual teaching style.

5. If assessment feedback seems to the students to have a ‘competitive’ purpose (rather than a ‘personal improvement’ purpose), can this demotivate low attainers?

Teachers revealed a mix of responses to this question. There is an indication of the tension teachers’ feel within themselves about the relative value of each of the two purposes for assessment. This question generated the most heat when discussed during the day. It focused attention on the links that exist between student learning on the one hand, and the teaching styles and strategies and the assessment, recording and reporting techniques used by teachers, on the other.

- Yes, but no more than all life’s experiences tend to reinforce this (e.g. ‘Second place is nothing’ – All Black coach).
- Yes, some students who have never ‘succeeded’ through summative assessment, tend to give up without an attempt. Everything is in the ‘too-hard basket’.
- Low attainers can be motivated by ‘competitive feed-back’ if the task is understood and achievable, just as they can be demotivated by any form of feed-back when the task is beyond them.

- Yes, this must be true, but it is also true that kids need to compete among themselves and that an improved mark can be an important reward. Is removing the mark or grade the answer?

COMMENT

Some teachers felt that 'competitive' related feed-back, usually in the form of marks or grades and comments on weaknesses, tended to foster the failure cycle – 'I can't do this', 'I'm not interested in this subject' or 'It's too hard'. This type of feed-back tended to make students focus on what they can't do, and demotivation followed.

Students who come to see themselves as unable to learn, as evidenced by their on-going low summative assessments, usually cease to take the subject seriously. This disaffection tends to result in disruptive classroom behaviour.

5. In what ways can assessment feedback seem to serve social and managerial functions, at the expense of the learning function?

This question evoked responses in which teachers considered the demands of the 'paperwork' they were involved with as part of the total assessment process.

- There is a need to educate parents about the assessment process so they can appreciate meaningful feedback, in terms of learning outcomes achieved (by their sons/daughters).
- Having the paperwork in order, looking impressive, seems to be becoming more important than the teaching / learning environment itself.

COMMENT

'Over-assessment' was the most common theme underpinning both the day-long discussions and the responses to the question. Teachers felt that the accountability factor was intruding to the extent that more summative assessments were being undertaken. School examinations were becoming a powerful control tool which 'regulated' student behaviour and the learning process. Marks were becoming over-important, together with the requirement to record the same performance information in more than one place, more than one time! Marks were judged to be a more convenient type of comment on success - easy to understand and useful for ranking purposes.

This over-emphasis meant that considerable class time was being spent on 'training' for examinations.

These same teachers felt that time needed to foster formative assessment approaches.

5. Does your school / departmental assessment policy foster the collection of marks to fill up records rather than to provide for the analysis of students' work to discern learning needs?

The range of responses reflected the dichotomy implicit in the question:

- I think there is a balance – we do require enough marks to provide an assessment each term. But the school is also concerned about discerning learning needs in order to provide extra help for those students who require it.
- Yes – since the year started, more summative assessment than I ever imagined.
- As an H.O.D. I'm into comments on students' work being recorded, but I have to fight for this. It's not in the 'culture' of the school, not in the mind-set of some staff.

COMMENT

Teacher responses indicated that, in the main, they worked to policies which attempted to address both sides of the issue raised by the question.

They indicated that they worked hard to find a balance between fulfilling the school / departmental demands for the recording of summative assessments, as well as endeavouring to identify the learning needs of individual students. This seeking of a balance reflects the tension teachers work within with respect to spending time gathering and recording meaningful information about student learning and providing helpful feedback to the students at the point of learning.

Teachers who have followed professionally offered advice about 'doing less (assessment) but do it better', have felt guilty about mark-books which look 'empty' compared with some of their colleagues' books. Extensive formative information (comments, ü or û against criteria etc) does not seem to be as acceptable as columns of marks!

4. BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE PRACTICE

The views of the teachers involved in this study supported the research evidence, cited by Black and Wiliam, that the every day practice of assessment in the classrooms is beset with problems and short-comings. These arise from tensions which exist between the 'political' commitment of schools (and the educational system) to 'high-stakes' assessment which dominates teaching. Despite many teacher's awareness of the value of formative assessment, when confronted with the realities of recording and reporting summaries of student achievement in summative terms, they cannot spend sufficient time providing helpful diagnosis to all their students.

This paper has outlined the manner in which, in general, marking and testing is carried out, how feed-back seems to serve social and managerial functions at the expense of learning functions and how constrained some teachers feel by the present demands placed on their time and teaching activities.

It becomes clear, as investigation of these problems progresses, that effective teaching and formative assessment are indivisible.

Most of the teachers involved in this study were caught in conflicts among system structures, political and social agendas, as well as educational philosophies and practices. They tended not to see assessment as a technical problem but as a social and philosophical function.

External tests / exams, together with school-wide testing regimes can constrain teachers to act against their own better judgement about the best ways to develop the learning of their students. Although these tests / exams have an important role to play in securing public confidence in their local schools, their undue influence upon the development of effective formative assessment is a significant constraining factor. Teachers, involved as they are in both tasks

- assessing students summatively for external purposes
- assessing on-going work to monitor and improve progress

find it difficult to reconcile their formative and summative roles. Confusion exists in their minds as a result.

5. TOWARDS THE IMPROVED USE OF FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT IN ENGLISH

- with the prime aim of raising student learning and achievement

Black and Wiliam's summary of research (see References) about formative assessment indicates that the interactive nature of teaching and learning provides the basis for modifying the teaching and learning activities in order to meet better the needs of the students.

They state that assessment becomes formative when the evidence is used to adapt the teaching work to meet those needs.

If this is the case there are big implications for classroom management strategies the use (or otherwise) of certain types of teaching strategies as well as for the nature of school / departmental policies regarding delivery of the curriculum and the use and value of summative assessments.

These same implications become even more significant within English classrooms, where most schools regard the responsibility for developing student literacy should lie.

And all of these factors must be related to the current climate of school-wide accountability, competition for enrolments and community pressure on schools to perform well in the 'league tables'.

The journals reviewed by Black and Wiliam contained a significant number of references to research on learning gains which had, as a common feature, enhanced formative assessment. Other features were variously associated with formative assessment and these would need to be taken into account if teachers wished to make significant changes to their classroom practices:

- Increased use of feed-back between teachers and students at the time of learning
- Active involvement of the students in the assessment of their progress
- Increased flexibility in planning to adjust activities to the learning needs of students as they are revealed.
- Greater awareness of the degree to which the motivation and self-esteem of students can be enhanced by effective use of formative assessment
- Increased use of peer and self-assessment as bases for improving learning.

The teachers involved in the day of discussion referred in various ways to each of the above points. The increased use of feed-back was seen as an impossibility against the demands of teaching large classes, the need to 'cover the syllabus' and the domination of 'high-stakes' assessment with its higher status in the eyes of the school as a whole.

Teachers did indicate that they are involving students in the assessment of their own progress. The new English curriculum with its achievement objectives, is leading more and more teachers to focus their teaching around relevant learning outcomes. As teachers make students more aware of the criteria for assessment, they are utilising peer assessment, and to a lesser extent student self-assessment as a basis for encouraging students to become aware of how they can improve their work. I have noted, as a visitor to classrooms, that where teachers have moved towards student-centred assessments, student attitudes to their work has been enhanced. If teachers continue to hold the reins of assessment (as in the managerial and social functions referred to in Question 7) students take less responsibility for their own learning than if peer assessment, and to an even greater extent self-assessment, have a significant place in classroom procedures as units of work are undertaken.

It is clear that as students' awareness of, understanding of, and even formulation of the criteria for assessment increases, so does their understanding of the work being undertaken.

Formative assessment can become more effective if students are trained in self-assessment so that they can understand the main purposes of their learning (by linking learning outcomes to relevant curriculum objectives), and thereby grasp what they need to do to achieve.

I have observed these processes in operation in low-attainer classes. Work is advanced one criterion at a time. But the sense of achievement felt by the students is as great as that experienced by more able students where work being formatively assessed may carry three or four criteria as a basis for peer or self assessment.

Greater motivation and increased student self-esteem follow the sustained use of these approaches. Teachers commented during the day on higher work rates and less disruptive behaviour in their classes. They hinted at a price for this – a slower pace of covering the syllabus. A sense of tension and guilt developed, particularly in schools where prescribed summative testing was scheduled across their department.

Others felt that the slowing down was short-term. They insisted that as greater student understanding took hold, speed of 'coverage' increased. As one teacher put it, *'I go slower, longer, in order to run faster, later'*.

One of the four factors which Black and Wiliam noted as supportive of the increased use of formative assessment, namely adjusting programmes or activities to suit learning needs, did not figure to any extent during the day-long discussions, nor in the written responses to the questions.

It seems that teacher perception of the value of formative assessment does not equally extend to modifying pre-planned units of work, nor to the pre-determined use of certain strategies, once a unit is under way. Even if the actual unit itself is a problem for the students, or if the main teaching strategy employed by the teacher does not suit all students, no major adaptation or change is made. Possibly because these are not even recognised by teachers as being at the heart of the problem.

Pre-testing, class discussion aimed at eliciting prior knowledge and understanding or planning **with** the class (as in Garth Boomer's 'negotiating' the curriculum) are strategies which can assist in this respect. Opportunities for students to share their evolving understanding should be built into planning.

The frequency of feed-back, arising from formative assessment at the point of learning, enhances learning. Teacher involvement, together with peer and self-assessment used throughout a unit can help to reduce the reliance on summative assessment as the sole means of monitoring and reporting on student progress. Feed-back to all students should be about the particular qualities of his or her work, relative to pre-set criteria, with advice on how to improve. Comparisons with other students are not necessary.

The maintaining of student portfolios – where primary evidence of work in progress, with both teacher and student comment on strengths and weaknesses at the time, - is an invaluable classroom management strategy which gives pride of place to formative assessment as a basis for on-going learning.

The effective use of portfolios can become the basis for recording individual student progress in a manner which could contribute to half year and end of year summative statements of achievement.

6. EMERGING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT NEEDS

The discussions among and the responses of, the twenty secondary English teachers involved in this study showed that carefully planned, sustained,

holistic professional development is required if formative assessment practices are to be effectively incorporated into classroom practice.

There is no one simple way to improve formative assessment. Many of the initiatives suggested in section five of this paper (and implicit in the teacher responses to the eight questions) take more class time. The underlying central purpose is to change the outlook on learning and the working methods of students.

A classroom culture of negotiation, questioning and focused thinking is needed. If professional development is to be effective in this aim to explore the potential of assessment to raise standards directly (ie. as an inherent component of each student's learning) it must promote and support change within the classroom. Whatever specifics emerge as components of the professional development, they can only be judged as beneficial on the basis of their effects in the classroom.

To achieve these changes any programme should concentrate on how improvements in formative assessment can:

- Enhance the quality of teacher / student interactions within any teaching / learning situation
- Identify and develop the strategies required by students to take active responsibility for their own learning
- Provide the particular assistance needed to move students out of the 'low-attainment trap'.

Any professional development programme built around these three broad approaches will only succeed if teachers find their own ways of incorporating the ideas and practices into their own patterns of classroom working. Teachers need help in doing this. Only a small percentage of innovative teachers is able to pick up ideas and principles and convert them into practical classroom ideas. Most teachers, particularly when confronted with all the other pressures already mentioned in this paper, need the support of other teachers, with whom they can identify, who can provide practical answers which justify a commitments to these ideas. Local networking, supported by external evaluators who can maintain development of the programme, could sustain dissemination over the period of time necessary to bring about such fundamental change.

7. CONCLUSION

The eight questions used as a basis for the day-long discussion with the twenty secondary English teachers provided plenty of scope for the issue of formative assessment and improved learning to be aired.

There is clearly a gap between the teachers' appreciation of the value of formative assessment and their capacity to implement the relevant practices. The higher status of summative assessments as a basis for reporting on student progress dominates their teaching approaches.

The fundamental shifts required to give formative assessment a place in the sun will require time, for:

- Effective professional development to take place;
- Relevant research into the existing relationship between the summative and formative roles faced by teachers;
- National policy to give a lead in this direction.

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APPENDIX

Summary responses by teachers to the eight discussion questions

1. *What are, the ways in which you understand and deal with the relationship between our formative, and summative assessment roles?*

- I understand **formative** to be closely linked to teaching and learning and **summative** measures achievement.
- I understand formative as **teaching** and summative as **assessment**.
- Formative is about pupils actively learning and progressing and monitoring themselves. Summative is about the teacher monitoring pupils' progress.
- Torn between what's best for pupils (formative) and demands of parents / employers / the system (summative).
- I have been dealing with formative assessment largely in the form of teacher conferencing - on an individual basis, reading through work completed so far and offering my comments and suggestions on how it could be improved. Formative assessment goes on **atdraft** stage of work. (Small classes enable me to employ this style.)
- Formative - user-friendly checkpoints and teacher observation (progress through the process). Summative assessment - final outcomes.
- Formative, to have real meaning, needs to be hands-on and immediate at time of task, so that the next step is taken assisted by teacher guidance. Summative allows the teacher to 'time-out', mark all scripts (prefer comments) in a less pressured out-of-class situation - the teacher becomes the eye-of-God!
- Formative - 'stepping stones' to summative.
- I use formative as the teaching tool leading to summative.
- Formative is an on-going teaching tool - gets students to take responsibility for learning more than summative.
- Formative - tasks set and graded or commented on as I teach each learning point. Summative is based on the final task, done by individual without supervision and incorporating all the teaching/learning points of the unit.
- Formative is included in the teaching process as opposed to the final summative assessment which is commented upon and graded. Increasingly there is a greater acceptance of formative assessment including group work and peer and self-assessment.

2. How does the predictive validity of your summative assessments compare with the external exam results of the same students?

- On a 'broad-band" basis it's fairly accurate - a few surprises - eg bright ones getting poor marks.
- It seems to be quite closely linked - this is where I see some value to summative, ie exam five weeks before School Certificate sorts out the unrealistic expectations of "slackers'.
- Very closely, because we mainly "teach to the exams'.
- If your summative assessments are linked to exam answer requirements, then the predictive validity is high.
- Generally favourably - school exams tend to prepare students for external exams in a school culture which strongly emphasises the importance of external exams. School exams can signpost students' progress.
- At Year 11 and 13 levels summative assessments are designed in the same format as external exam.
- Fairly **closely** linked, particularly when the set summative **tasks and time constraints replicate** the **external exam** situation.
- Quite close. I tend to mark hard and students tend to do better in the external exam. I use internal exams as a type of formative assessment so that they can see where they need to improve for the external exams.

3. Marking is usually conscientious but in what ways could / should it offer guidance on how work can be improved?

- Comments at the end. Perhaps having a finite criteria sheet would be more helpful.
- Should be specific - have a criteria mark sheet.
- A strength needs to be identified before constructive suggestions for improvement are offered. These suggestions should relate to criteria that the student is already aware of.
- Ideally would be done in a conference-type situation as in primary school writing classes.
- Should indicate what has been done well and also indicate areas to improve - with suggestions provided. Often time and opportunity preclude this unfortunately.

- Comment on: 1. what you like; 2. what can be improved - only one or two suggestions (in terms that can be understood by the student).
- Specific comments, positive first and then focus on how student can improve.
- Identify only **one** weakness, and as many strengths as possible.
- As above, but can be reinforced within a class by going over points, providing modelling, etc.

4. In what ways can teacher / classroom tests encourage rote and superficial learning?

- Because they learn to spout out for a 'test' and promptly forget because they probably haven't understood the concepts in the first place.
- Again, the concepts may not be applied, simply provided - students happy to produce the answers but this does not necessarily indicate true learning or application.
- If they are one-off - and the skills being tested are not applied, then it is **superficial**.
- If it is entirely content-based, not asking for responses. Rote learning is usually the result of training and coaching,, not teaching.
- When the marks are more important than the learning.
- When students are aware of exactly what they are to be tested on (which is often pretty much the case - they need to be prepared) then they can limit themselves to learning specifically what is required, rather than seeing the broader view.
- By not being applied to practical situations - ie, not context supplied other than the test.
- By telling students "this is what you have to say / think / do in order to score well".
- By encouraging "getting it right" rather than understanding the underlying processes involved.
- Drilling them to supply finite 'marker-happy' answers.
- Emphasis on content - not easy to do this in English, at' junior levels anyway.
- By telling students "write this down ... it will be tested" - used as a discipline tool. It is learnt - but probably not retained for more than 24 hours - because students do not see its true value - only as a means to an end - to gain a good test result.
- Focus on content, as opposed to interpretation / analysis - ideally, skills should be modelled by students in discussion with each other. Not always an activity that is a high priority in classrooms. Also requires some skill on the teacher's part.

- Depends on a teacher's philosophy about education. I do not particularly want to read what think 25 times – I want to read whatthey think.

5. Is it typical that the giving of marks and the grading functions are over-emphasised, while the giving of useful advice and the learning function are under-emphasised?

- Yes, because society is competitive and multi-classed, and our education system reflects this reality.
- Students themselves tend to 'demand' a grade by way of evaluating their own relative positions. But I think there is largely a genuine desire to emphasise useful learning, the gathering and development of skills. Unfortunately there is not a lot of creativity in the assessment of these things. Exam assessments are limited in scope and hence give the impression of limitations (of student ability / achievement).
- Can depend on classes; senior more so for grading functions but junior classes allow for 'useful' advice and learning opportunities.
- Yes - perhaps it's also to do with needing tests, etc to be manageable for teachers.
- I think that this is an individual thing. Certainly the importance of marks and grades are emphasised but not, I think to the detriment of 'useful advice and the learning function'. I think the two can be combined effectively.
- In a largely externally assessed secondary education system grading and marks through tests and exams are an expectation which the community of employers, parents, and the students themselves demand. Whether this is overemphasised is as much a political consideration as an educational one.
- Depends on your teaching style. Even under the limitations imposed by external exams, one can still facilitate pupil learning using peer-assessment and being clear about learning outcomes and criteria.
- Yes - I believe students are **most** concerned with 'What did I get?' rather than 'What can(t) I do?' or 'What do I need to improve?'
- Yes - the advice gets ignored and marks command all the attention.
- We can tend to indicate what needs to be done, to improve but not have enough time to go over **how to** do it.
- Yes - school and community culture - through the school culture does seem to be improving.

6. If assessment feedback seems to the students to have a competitive" purpose (rather than a 'personal improvement' purpose), can this demotivate low attainers?

- Yes, but no more than all life's experiences tend to reinforce this (eg "second place is nothing" - All Black Coach).
- Yes - some students, who have never 'succeeded" through summative assessment, tend to give up without an attempt. Everything is in the "too-hard basket".
- Yes - definitely - particularly if they're not interested in the subject anyway - they'll just adopt a 'who cares' attitude as a defensive mechanism for failing yet again.
- Yes - students tend to focus on what they can't do rather than what they can.
- Definitely - but the teacher can pre-empt such "failure cycles".
- I agree, but feel that feedback should be used to encourage a better result in future, and that a competitive environment can also give students a spirit of endeavour if fostered **in the right way**.
- It can - but not all assessment feedback needs to accentuate the competitive purpose. Indeed, the personal improvement aspect can be the major focus in some assessments.
- Definitely - they can get used to the "failure cycle". As a result of always getting poor results they don't bother trying. At least with the 'improvement purpose' they can **achieve** and see **some** improvement.
- Yes, to the point where the students will not even attempt the task at hand for fear of failure.
- Low attainers can motivated by 'competitive feedback' if the task is understood and achievable just as they can he demotivate any form of feedback when the task is beyond them.
- Yes this must be true but it is also true that kids need to compete among themselves and that an improved mark can be an important reward. Is removing the mark or grade the answer?
- Yes – it reinforces what they cannot do – rather than giving positive feedback.
- Yes, why try if they know they'll be at the bottom anyway?
- Yes. It reinforces the self-image of failure.

7. In what ways can assessment feedback seem to serve social and managerial functions, at the expense of the learning function?

- Having the paperwork in order, looking impressive, seems to be becoming more important than the teaching / learning environment itself.
- Reflects old British-based function of education as a chaff-sorter, to stream pupils into professional / white collar – blue collar etc.
- Because we're being dictated to by the public sector; we're training for exams to produce a grade for prospective employers.
- The number / quality of skills to be assessed has increased since I began teaching "25 years ago" – also the depth of assessment.
- I spend a lot of time I never used to have on things like **Individual Pupil Files** – collecting samples – recording the same information in more than one place.
- It seems so important to have a mark, even if the task is inappropriate to a student's abilities. Do we **need** to force 'special needs' students to sit the test just so we can give them a 'O' or other negative feedback?
- Parents / employers want **marks as** they are convenient to understand and rank people clearly. Schools face pressures to conform to this external expectation.
- The demand for summative assessments does not necessarily result in quality feedback. There is a need to educate parents about the assessment process so they can appreciate meaningful feedback **in** terms of learning outcomes achieved.
- Exams are a very powerful control and time tool which regulate student behaviour and learning processes.

7. Does your school / departmental assessment policy foster the collection of marks to fill up records rather than to provide for the analysis of students' work to discern learning needs?

- I think there is a balance - we do require enough marks to provide an assessment each term. But the school is also concerned about discerning learning needs in order to provide extra help for those students who require it.
- **No.** It attempts to gather both summative assessment task records, but individual teachers are responsible for identifying the learning needs of particular classes / individuals.
- School policy = collection of summative information. English teachers - both formative and summative information is collected.

- There is certainly a need expressed to show the paperwork has been done, but the main emphasis is to show learning has taken place.
- A combination of both. We're working at skills-based reporting especially in Years 9 and 10.
- **Yes!!!** - I am constantly filling in 'final-mark' records.
- Yes! Since the year started more summative assessment than I ever **imagined!**
- Yes - but I think we're trying to do the formative thing too.
- As, an HOD I'm into comments on students' work being recorded, but I have to fight for this. It's not in the 'culture' of the school, not in the mind-set of some staff.
- To some degree - it's hard to move away from the 'security' that a mark for a summative assessment gives.
- The collection of marks is not to 'fill up the records' but rather to assess ability (rather than progress possibly). Whether this assessment is particularly relevant at times is questionable especially as a tool to discern future learning needs.
- A bit of both. Often we collect work for a 'final mark' yet this is not integrated into the learning process whereby the student gets the assessment back and makes the improvement. Process is lacking.