

Rethinking thinking on assessment: reforming educational policy and classroom practices

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Abstract

Internationally, assessment has become central to both educational policy and practice and is deemed by educators and learners alike as playing a pivotal role in the learning and teaching cycle. Many definitions of assessment abound, and Huba and Freed (2000) broadly define it as the process of gathering and discussing information from multiple and diverse sources in order to develop a deep and vivid picture of students' knowledge and understanding.

In the context of Irish educational policy and practice, assessment has historically developed from summative assessment involving traditional rote approaches to learning to a more sophisticated approach utilising both formative and summative assessment, as will be introduced in all subjects for Junior Cycle secondary schools in September 2019.

This paper will examine the historical nature of the development of assessment policy and practices in Ireland. This is timely in light of current reform across all subject areas at Junior Cycle level. Black and William (1998) identified the potentially sizable benefits to be made when formative assessment is used as evidence to adapt teaching to meet students' needs and this paper will draw on literature and theory to argue the case for both summative and formative assessment as a key players in enhancing learning and teaching.

Key: assessment for learning; assessment of learning; educational policy; educational reform; pedagogy;