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ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING IN MATHEMATICAL CLASSROOMS

Much of the literature that considers assessment suggests that rather than using assessment to track and file away the results of learners, assessment should be diagnostic. So, testing a learner is a little like taking her to the doctor for a check-up.

The point of the assessment is to see what the child needs to bring her to full mathematical health and proficiency.

The literature asks us to shift away from assessment **of** learning to assessment **for** learning. Sometimes the most valuable assessment is informal – immediate feedback that is meaningful and useful is helpful to the learner – especially when she has just completed an exercise and it is fresh in her mind. If the teacher (or the learner herself) has set a specific goal for the maths exercise, and the feedback helps her get closer to that goal – then that feedback has helped her mathematical understanding.

It's easier to give a learner feedback if her thinking is visible. The research refers to "mathematical classrooms" as places where visible thinking is evident during mathematical discussions, explanations, demonstrations, drawing, writing and other ways that ideas are conveyed.

So, it's important that we structure our teaching method to encourage learners to show their mathematical thinking. If the teacher understands how a learner approached the problem, and how he solved it (or not) – that is more valuable than just marking the problem right or wrong.

So, teachers should provide diagnostic tasks (or exercises that will be marked with feedback given) often; and our approach to assessment for learning should include timely and detailed feedback which includes showing the learner his progress towards a bigger goal that he is aiming for.

Think about these tips so that your focus is on assessment for learning:

- Show an interest in ALL learner responses (whether correct or incorrect). Ask follow-up questions to lead learners to the correct answer or to extend their thinking.
- Allow learners to explain, and where possible, justify their actions and calculation.
- Maximise opportunities to bring learners thinking out into the open so that you understand what they know and what possible misconceptions they might be holding onto.
- Do frequent item analysis. Focus on competences (what learners can and cannot do) rather than raw marks.
- Use learner errors as stepping stones for learning.
- Assessment should inform remediation.

This is an open source educational resource drafted by Social Innovations. This note draws from the research report Into the Gap, authored by CASME. The references for the research are cited in the full report which can be downloaded from www.socialinnovations.co.za