

The Factor of 2

Assessment literacy through precision in practice

By Lyn Sharratt

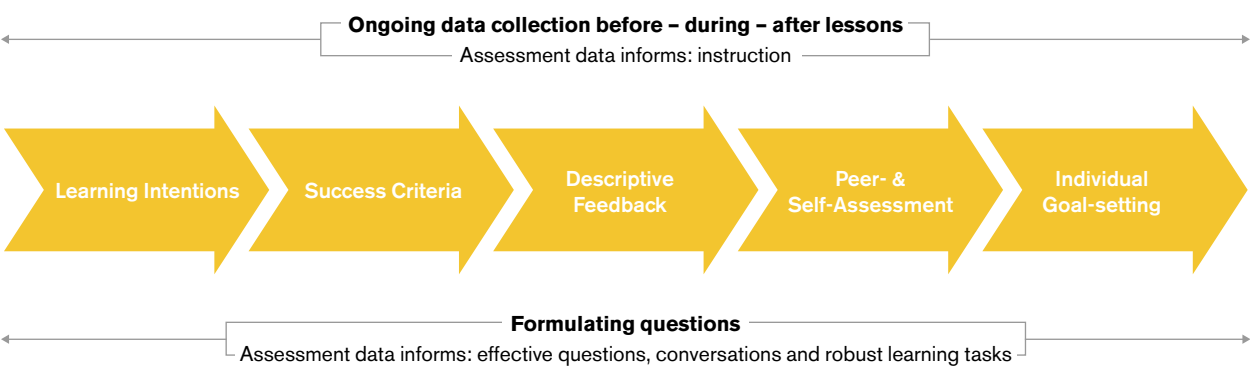
Professor John Hattie’s landmark Visible Learning research (2009) concluded that effective (descriptive) feedback (DF), combined with effective instruction, improves the rate of learning by a factor of 2. Here, I support Hattie’s findings but add that DF cannot be a stand-alone strategy. I make the case that to achieve ‘The Factor of 2’ impact, effective assessment and instruction must be defined as nesting within a robust Assessment Literacy Framework (See Figure 1).

It is within this Framework, when walking in classrooms and working *alongside* teachers, *not evaluating them*, that principals, vice-principals and teacher-leaders will witness their own impact on learning. Only by providing students with specific Descriptive Feedback against the elements of the Assessment Literacy Framework will learners know ‘where they are at,’ ‘how they are doing,’ ‘where they are going’ and ‘how they are going to get there.’ This is the power of ‘The Factor of 2.’

THE ‘ASSESSMENT FOR AND AS LEARNING’ FRAMEWORK

Nothing else matters in teaching and learning as much as quality assessment; that is, data that informs and differentiates instruction for each learner in a never-ending cycle of inquiry to discover what works best (Sharratt, 2019). Ongoing ‘assessment for and as learning’ practices are the drivers

FIG. 1 Assessment For and As Learning Framework



Assessment **for** learning

involves teachers determining where students are in their learning through assessment of prior knowledge and using the information (data) collected from ongoing, daily assessments and observations of current learning to plan for differentiated instruction, thinking about the needs of the whole class, small groups and individual students.

VS.

Assessment **as** learning

involves students using clearly articulated, co-constructed Success Criteria (SC), visible classroom prompts and feedback from teachers and peers to articulate their next steps in learning. Importantly, in this process, students become reflective of their capabilities and learn to own their personal improvement. Ultimately, gradually increasing the autonomy of learners leads to self-regulation and metacognition or knowing how one learns best.

(Sharratt, 2019)

of change in every classroom; fair, equitable and clearly understood assessment practices should be at the very core of learning for students and of teaching for educators in every system and school. These practices ensure equity and excellence – the heart of educational improvement.

The 'waterfall' Assessment Framework in Figure 1 depicts all the components of 'assessment for and as learning.' No amount of instruction will work unless it is informed by transparent teacher and student self-assessment practices. Descriptive Feedback is but one, all-be-it a very important part of the 'assessment for and as learning framework.' Teachers and leaders need CLARITY in understanding how the following components of Figure 1 weave together to form robust classroom assessment practices.

LEARNING INTENTIONS

Learning Intentions (LIs) flow from conversations with students about the big ideas and essential questions of a unit of study. LIs are derived directly from state standards or provincial curriculum expectations and answer the question, "What are we learning?" and "Why?" The LI must make sense, be meaningful to students, be purposefully unpacked and then be communicated in student-friendly language. A LI is not what students are 'doing.' Further, for students to understand the why and the what they are learning in the unit of study, teachers must deconstruct the words with their students and put these prompts on charts that are visible for all students, to be used to support their thinking. Classrooms filled with anchor charts of prompts for students' use make the learning pathways visible.

SUCCESS CRITERIA

Success Criteria (SC), or how students know what success looks like, flow from the LIs. SC must be clear, visible in classrooms and easily understood by students. Most importantly, SC must paint an accurate picture of what is truly the essential learning that will be assessed in the LI. When teachers co-construct SC collaboratively with students and add to them continuously as learning unfolds through the unit or exploration of a "wicked problem," students understand, in detail, how to be successful – with no surprises! Experiencing scaffolded instruction that supports attainment of the SC moves students from being engaged to being empowered to take charge of their own successful learning.

DESCRIPTIVE FEEDBACK

Descriptive Feedback that directly relates to the co-constructed Success Criteria provides students with practical, direct and useful insights that outline how to move their work forward to achieve the intended learning intention. Feedback can come from the classroom teacher, other teachers who provide support to students (e.g. special education resource teachers), leaders who walk in classes and self or peers. Descriptive Feedback

- focuses on the intended learning
- identifies specific strengths
- points to areas needing improvement
- suggests pathways that students can take to close the gap between where they are now and where they need to be to elevate their level of learning

FOUR FORMS OF FEEDBACK

1. ORAL FEEDBACK is potentially the most powerful form of feedback when it is in-the-moment, on-the-spot, i.e. the teachable moment and is precisely tailored to the LIs and SCs. Teachers get the best feedback results from conversations with students, usually held privately, about a piece of student work. Teachers carry sticky notes, a clipboard or hand-held device when giving the feedback so that they can record anecdotal notes.

2. WRITTEN FEEDBACK is effective when it is connected to the Learning Intention that aligns with curriculum expectations and uses terms from the Success Criteria. A rule of thumb is that written Descriptive Feedback includes one praise point and one or two instructional points, with examples, related to a curriculum expectation(s) being addressed, the SC and the student's intended learning goal.

3. DEMONSTRATIVE FEEDBACK is most effective when teachers model the learning for individual or small groups of students. Effective examples include helping a kindergarten student hold a pencil correctly, showing a group of Junior students how to correct a volleyball serve, guiding a group of young writers by creating a series of opening sentences for paragraphs or providing on-the-spot feedback that assists students in refining their techniques (Sharratt, 2010).

4. COLLECTIVE FEEDBACK occurs when teachers observe that all students need to go deeper into a text or in understanding a concept. Teachers literally and figuratively “share the pen” with students as they deconstruct and “think aloud” as they examine a piece of anonymous work. Together they note important aspects of the work and try to revise sections that they all feel need improvement, always referring to their co-constructed SC. Students most often need to see “what we’re talking about in their feedback” unfold explicitly in front of them. They discuss improvements to the writing with the teacher and with each other, often getting into academic controversy, which is where collective feedback makes collective learning happen!

These four forms of feedback guide students in being capable of self-assessing against the Success Criteria.

- chunks the amount of corrective feedback the student can handle at one time and
- models the kind of thinking with which students will engage when they self-assess (Sharratt, 2010).

It is essential that students receive feedback during the learning, and it's equally important that they are provided with sufficient time to process, establish a clear understanding of the comments provided and implement what they have learned from the feedback (Sharratt, 2010). These are critical steps in measurably enhancing student learning.

PEER- & SELF-ASSESSMENT

It is important to provide students with multiple opportunities to practice the feedback given. Students need time to improve and master concepts before new tasks with different criteria for success are introduced. There are four forms of Descriptive Feedback. It is critical to give examples alongside the feedback (Sharratt, 2010).

Self-assessment occurs when students gather feedback about and reflect on their own learning; that is, students own the assessment of their personal progress in knowledge, skills, processes and/or attitudes. Learning how to self-assess starts in kindergarten; the capacity to self-assess forms another basis point for self-regulation. The process demands that students use the feedback received previously against the SC as a reference when assessing their own work and the work of their peers. The internalized process leads to students' ability to reflect on, evaluate and set their own goals to improve their work (Sharratt, 2019).

INDIVIDUAL GOAL-SETTING

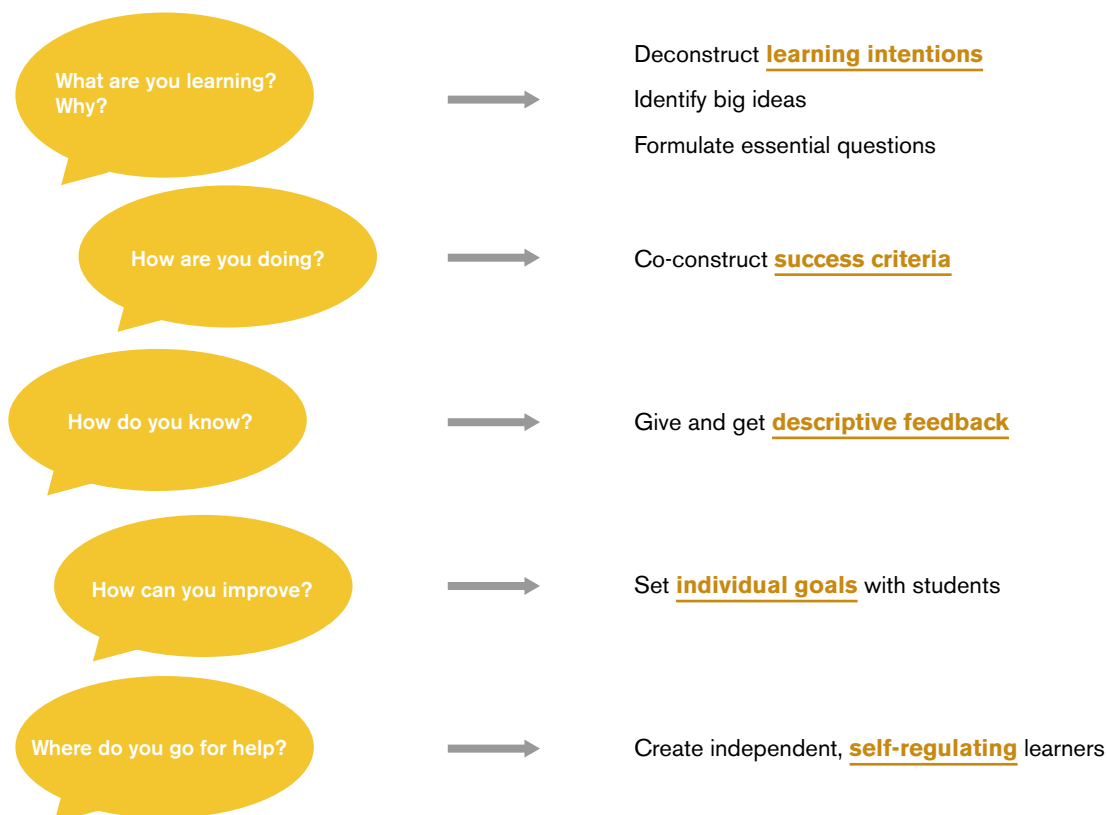
The ultimate destination in the ‘assessment for and as learning’ framework (Figure 1) is students’ developing the capacity for individual goal-setting, in collaboration with other students, or with teachers and students conferencing together. When students achieve CLARITY from deconstructed LIs, co-constructed SC and targeted Descriptive Feedback to amend or revise their own work, there are no surprises for anyone when summative evaluation (assessment ‘of’ learning) takes place. Students and teachers can judge for themselves how well they have done.

Teachers must continuously ask, “Can my students apply what has been learned to new situations?” This can occur only when co-constructed SC are used so that students can assess their work or when they use the Descriptive Feedback received to self-assess and improve their work. When students

FIG. 2 Precision in Alignment of the 5 Questions and 'Assessment For and As Learning' Framework

If **STUDENTS** answer ...

TEACHERS can



know and can verbalize this total process they used in order to learn, they become their own teachers.

These critical components of assessment literacy must inform daily instructional approaches – never the other way around! Assessment drives instruction. Descriptive Feedback multiplies the impact when the SC are the correct ones.

PRECISION IN PRACTICE AS LEADERS IN CLASSROOMS

Undefined praise addressed to students is unlikely to be effective, because it carries little information that provides answers to any of the three questions: “Where am I going?,” “How am I going?” and, “Where to next?” and it too often deflects attention from the task (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). I encourage leaders to ask students five questions during their Learning Walks and Talks (LWTs)

(Sharratt 2008–2018). Answers enable Walkers to determine if students have CLARITY in their learning and to understand if students know how to use feedback provided to improve their learning (Sharratt, 2019). Walkers in LWTs select one or two students in each class to answer five questions:

1. What are you learning? Why?
2. How are you doing?
3. How do you know?
4. How can you improve?
5. Where do you go for help?

The five questions are not one-off conversation starters. Figure 2 shows the direct link between the five questions to ask students and the ‘Assessment for and as Learning’ Framework (Sharratt, 2019, pp.331-333). The students’ answers to the questions bring precision to assessment “for” and “as” learning and CLARITY to next step practices in classrooms. Walkers look to see that all

“It was only when I discovered that feedback was most powerful when it is from the ‘student to the teacher’ that I started to understand it better. When teachers seek, or at least are open to feedback from students as to what students know, what they understand, where they make errors, when they have misconceptions, when they are not engaged – then teaching and learning can be synchronized and powerful.”

(Hattie, 2009)

components of assessment “for” and “as” learning framework are explicitly in place in every classroom and that students can articulate each component of Figure 1 by accurately answering the questions in Figure 2. For leaders, the answers contribute to the data collection that forms the basis of Descriptive Feedback they can offer teachers, individually and collectively, and of the next steps needed in differentiating Professional Learning for staff.

IMPACT!

Many leaders acknowledge the power of the five questions nested within the components of the ‘assessment for and as learning’ framework and incorporate them in their daily Learning Walks and Talks. One highly-accomplished instructional leader, Jill Maar, Principal in York Region District School Board, walks in her school daily looking for evidence of the components of the waterfall chart in every classroom. She says:

“In terms of assessment “for” and “as” learning, I regularly meet with teachers to discuss their students’ data through Case Management Meetings – one student at a time. In staff meetings, I talk about the frequency of the data collection, where student voice is within that assessment process, and whether students are setting their own learning goals. (Sharatt, 2019, p. 313).

Another principal, Judith Ryan, says,

“As leaders and teachers, we use the data collected during Learning Walks and Talks to narrow our areas of need on the

Assessment Framework (Figure 1). As a community of learners, we focus on the five questions, for example, to help us, as a staff, have an intense focus on developing constructive feedback with each other and on setting our own Learning Goals. Our staff love doing Learning Walks and Talks together. We developed ‘The Learning Walks and Talks Feedback Book’ too. It was something we all had to go into with trust, being non-judgmental and focusing on being about building teacher capacity – the capacities of all. (Judith Ryan, Principal, Wilcannia-Forbes Diocese, in Personal Conversation, Nov. 2018).

CONCLUSION

Having students and teachers answer the five questions provides feedback to leaders and teachers, guiding their next steps in making learning, teaching and leading visible. As Maar and Ryan noted, to become more effective and to increase students’ achievement, leaders and teachers must offer Descriptive Feedback in the context of the comprehensive ‘assessment for and as learning’ framework (Figure 1). By continuing to be precise in assessment literacy practices, leaders, teachers and students will easily accomplish our target – Hattie’s ‘Factor of 2!’ ▲

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