Formative assessment in MFL: What is it, and how can we make it work for both teachers and students?

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One big idea:
- To improve the quality of teaching and learning by making day to day classroom-based assessment even better.

Overview

- Why focus on formative assessment?
- What is formative assessment?
- Why hasn't it worked in schools?
- How can we make it work for teachers and students?
  - Success criteria
  - Questioning
  - Feedback

Which of these are examples of formative assessment?

A. A teacher uses test results to plan a revision session for their students.

B. Teachers doing item-by-item analysis of Year 10 French test results to review the Year 10 curriculum.

C. A school tests students every 10 weeks to predict which students are "on course" to pass the end-of-year exam.

D. "Three-quarters of the way through a unit" test.

E. A teacher looks at students' mini-whiteboard responses and addresses misconceptions.

F. Students who fail a test on Monday have to come back on Tuesday.

G. Exit pass question: "What is the difference between *ser* and *estar*?"

H. "Translate this paragraph onto your mini-white boards."

Why focus on formative assessment?

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- In the classrooms of the best teachers, students learn at **twice the rate** they do in the classrooms of average teachers
  - they learn in six months what students taught by the average teachers take a year to learn.
  - And in the classrooms of the least effective teachers, the same learning will take two years.
  - Moreover, in the classrooms of the most effective teachers, students from disadvantaged backgrounds learn just as much as those from advantaged backgrounds,
  - and those with behavioural difficulties learn as much as those without (Wiliam, 2016).

What is formative assessment?

What is formative assessment?

□ On an international level, the term "formative assessment" does not have a defined meaning (Anderson & Palm, 2017; Wiliam, 2014).

□ Some say:
  ■ It can only be applied when it is integrated into teaching (Shepard, 2008);
  ■ It relates to tests which can be taken at regular intervals over periods of several months (Marshall, 2005).

Definitions of formative assessment

- Sadler
  - Formative assessment is concerned with how judgements about the quality of student responses (performances, pieces, or works) can be **used to shape and improve the student's competence** by short-circuiting the randomness and inefficiency of trial and error learning (1989: 120).

- He also makes us aware that formative assessment should not be the sole responsibility of the teacher, but also requires changes in learners too:
  - The indispensable conditions for improvements are that the **student comes to hold a concept of quality similar to that held by the teacher**, is able to monitor **continuously that quality of that is being produced during the act of production itself** (1989: 121).

Definitions of formative assessment

- In the UK, the term "formative assessment" tends to be built upon the pioneering work of Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam.
  - All those activities undertaken by teachers and/or their students, which provide information to be used as feedback to modify teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged (1998: 8).

- Sadler
  - [Formative assessment] refers to assessment that is specifically intended to provide feedback on performance to improve and accelerate learning (1998: 77).

Definitions of formative assessment

- Cowie and Bell
  - [Formative assessment is] the process used by teachers and students to recognise and respond to student learning in order to enhance that learning, during learning (1999: 102).

- Wiliam and Leahy
  - An assessment is formative to the extent that information from the assessment is fed back within the system and actually used to improve the performance of the system in some way (2007: 31).

- Shepard
  - Formative assessment is defined as assessment carried out during the instructional process for the purpose of improving teaching or learning … What makes formative assessment formative is that it is immediately used to make judgements so as to form new learning (2008: 281).

Definitions of formative assessment

☐ What all of these definitions have in common is that it is the **use of the information to adjust teaching and learning, during the learning process**, in which the formative "label" can be applied.

☐ In short, formative assessment is a **dialogue** (whether oral or written), between the teacher and a student, in order to move learning forward.

Definitions of formative assessment

- As Swanwick puts it, 'to teach is to assess' (1988: 149)
  - Teachers who observe, model and give constructive comments to improve are using formative assessment.

- Although this might not be seen, by some, as assessment this is exactly what is going on!

- The nature of formative assessment does not include marks, levels or grades.
- Nor does it compare students with one another.
- Instead, it focuses on what the next steps in learning are.

The key idea about formative assessment

☐ The key idea with formative assessment is not only the collecting of information, but that is actively **used and acted upon**.

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Definitions of formative assessment

☐ Although there is some clarity as to what "formative" means, it seems that the term has become confused (Bennett, 2011; James *et al.*, 2006) and problematic.

☐ Despite the wealth of research into and exemplification of good formative assessment, 'there has been no (or at best limited) effect on learning outcomes nationally (Coe, 2013: 10).

Why hasn't it worked in schools?

Why hasn't it worked in schools? (1)

- The Assessment Reform Group (ARG)
  - The term "formative" is open to a variety of interpretations and often means no more than that assessment is carried out frequently and is planned at the same time as teaching.
  - It may be formative in helping the teacher identify areas where more explanation or practice is needed.
  - But for the pupils, the marks or remarks in their work may tell them about the successes of failures but not how to make progress towards future learning (1999: 7).

Why hasn't it worked in schools? (1)

☐ This point is further exemplified by Wiliam:

- ❑ 'the big mistake Paul and I made was calling this stuff "assessment" … because when you use the word assessment, people think about tests and exams'

  (Stewart, 2012).

- ❑ He later expresses that it should probably have been called something like "responsive teaching".

Why hasn't it worked in schools? (1)

- Wiliam (October 2013)

Dylan Wiliam
@dylanwiliam

Following

Replying to @DrChips_

@DrChips_ Example of really big mistake: calling formative assessment formative assessment rather than something like "responsive teaching"

5:03 PM - 23 Oct 2013

Why hasn't it worked in schools? (1)

☐ Wiliam (March 2018)

Dylan Wiliam @dylanwiliam · 7h

The point I was making—years ago now—is that it would have been much easier if we had called formative assessment "responsive teaching". However, I now realize that this wouldn't have helped since it would have given many people the idea that it was all about the teacher's role.

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Why hasn't it worked in schools? (2)

- Ruth Butler (1988) - Israel:
  - 264 low and high ability grade 6 students in 12 classes in 4 schools.
  - Same teaching, same aims, same teachers, same classwork.

  - First lesson: students in each class were given a booklet containing a range of different thinking tasks.
  - At the end of the lesson, their work was collected in.
  - The work was marked by independent markers.
  - At the start of the next lesson, two days later, students were given feedback on the work they had done.
  - Three kinds of feedback: grades, comments, grades + comments.
  - Marks were recorded in teacher planners.

  - Students were then asked to attempt some similar tasks and were told that they would receive the same sort of feedback as before.
  - Again, the work was collect in and marked.

The effect of giving marks, levels or grades

	Achievement	Attitude
Grades	No gain	High scorers: positive Low scorers: negative
Comments	30% gain	High scorers: positive Low scorers: positive

What happened for students given both grades and comments?

A. Gain: 30%;   Attitude: all positive
B. Gain: 30%;   Attitude: high scorers positive, low scorers negative
C. Gain: 0%;   Attitude: all positive
D. Gain: 0%;   Attitude: high scorers positive, low scorers negative
E. Something else….

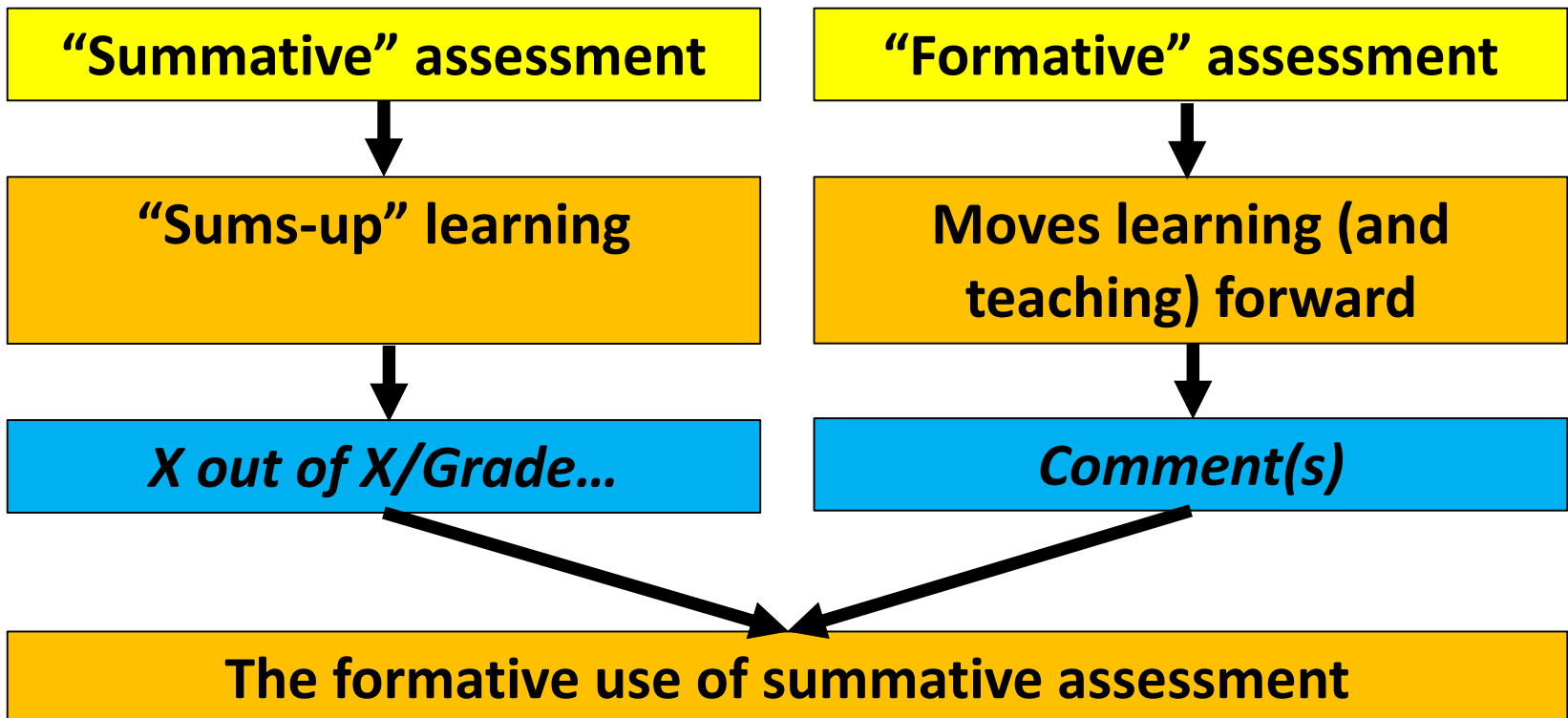# It has been tried and tested many times….

- Fuchs & Fuchs (1986)
- Natriello (1987)
- Brooks (1988)
- Bangert-Drowns *et al*.(1991)
- Dempster (1991)
- Dempster (1992)
- Elshout-Mohr (1994)
- Kluger & DeNisi (1996)
- Black & Wiliam (1998)
- Nyquist (2003)

- Brookhart (2004)
- Allal & Lopez (2005)
- Köller (2005)
- Brookhart (2007)
- Wiliam (2007)
- Hattie & Timperley (2007)
- Shute (2008)
- Kingston & Nash (2001, 2015)
- Booth (2014)

"Summative" and "formative" assessment

☐ A big part of the problem is that "summative" and "formative" assessment serve different purposes.

"Summative" assessment	"Formative" assessment
"Sums-up" learning	Moves learning (and teaching) forward
X out of X/Grade...	*Comment(s)*

The formative use of summative assessment

"Summative" and "formative" assessment

- Kohn (1994) posits that we should never grade students whilst they are still learning; as soon as they receive a grade, the learning stops as students focus far more on the consequences of the grades

  (Andrade and Heritage, 2018; Sousa, 2015).

- As such, if, as Kohn (1994) suggests, grades stop learning then students should be given them as infrequently as possible (Kohn, 1994; Sousa, 2015).

Why hasn't it worked in schools? (3)

☐ In some schools, there may be pressure on teachers to produce high levels of attainment in the form of marks or grades from assessments (Fautley and Savage, 2008).

   ☐ Teachers may be consciously neglecting their formative practices and beliefs in favour of mini-summative assessments for data tracking purposes.

How can we make it work for teachers and students?

Sharing what success looks like: Success criteria

Success criteria

☐ It's like knowing the teacher's secret (Spendlove, 2009: 18).

☐ Clarke (2005) differentiates two types of success criteria:
- Product
- Process

☐ **Product:** merely tell students what the end product would look like.

☐ **Process:** the key steps or ingredients the student needs in order to fulfill the learning objective (Clarke, 2005: 29).

Success criteria

- **Product:** "I can conjugate the imperfect tense accurately."
  - Ok, but what is it *exactly* students have to **do** in order to do it accurately?

- **Process:**
  - <u>Success criteria</u>:
    - Is the verb regular or irregular?
    - Take off the last two letters of the infinitive.
    - What "person" am I using?
    - Add the new ending

Success criteria

□ **Product:** "I can describe my free time in Spanish."

  ◘ Ok, but what is it *exactly* students have to **do** in order to describe it well?

□ **Process:**

  ◘ <u>Success criteria (remember to)</u>:

    ■ Say what you **normally do** in your free time and who you do it with.
    ■ Give an opinion and reason about it.
    ■ Say what you **did last weekend**.
    ■ Give an opinion and reason about it.
    ■ Say what you are **going to do this weekend**.
    ■ Give an opinion and reasons about what it will be like.

Success criteria

☐ Process success criteria, then, allows for regular formative assessment, for both teachers and students, during the lesson, on the journey to fulfilling the lesson's learning intention.

☐ When students are clear on **what they need to do to be successful**, *feedback* is then required to keep learning moving forward.

☐ The *quality* of the feedback, though, depends on the *quality of the evidence of learning gathered* in the first place.

How can we make it work for teachers and students?

Eliciting *quality* evidence of learning

Formative assessment – From plan 'A' to plan 'B'

Multiple choice questions: "Hinge questions"

- Multiple choice questions have a bad reputation.
  - They can be an extremely effective teaching and learning strategy if they are done well!

- Assumption that closed questions are bad.
  - Closed questions, which are done well, can be highly effective
  - Even better for closed questions to elicit higher-order (deeper) thinking from students

Diagnosis for formative assessment in Spanish

Which of the following is the correct translation for **"I give the book to him"**?

A. (Yo) lo doy el libro.
B. (Yo) doy le el libro.
C. (Yo) le doy el libro.
D. (Yo) doy lo el libro.
E. (Yo) doy el libro le.
F. (Yo) doy el libro lo.

Having "diagnosed", through discussion I am able to find out:

1) Are pronouns the problem?

2) Is sentence order the problem?

3) Is it both?

Start with misconceptions

Diagnosis for formative assessment in Spanish

"Last year you (singular) lived in England."

El año pasado _____ en Inglaterra

1. vivieron
2. vivo
3. he vivido
4. vives
5. voy a vivir
6. vivimos
7. habéis vivido
8. vive
9. vivías
10. vivimos
11. vivíais
12. vivís
13. viviste
14. va a vivir
15. viven
16. ha vivido
17. vais a vivir
18. viva
19. vivas
20. van a vivir
21. vivisteis
22. vivió
23. vivíamos
24. has vivido
25. vas a vivir
26. vivamos
27. viváis
28. han vivido
29. vivan
30. hemos vivido
31. vamos a vivir
32. viví
33. vivía
34. vivían

Hinge questions: design requirements

□ A hinge question is based on the important concept in a lesson that is critical for students to understand **before you move on** in the lesson.

□ The question can fall at the beginning (range-finding) or middle (mid-lesson correction) of the lesson.

□ It should be a **diagnostic** and not a **discussion** question.

□ Every student must respond to the question within two minutes.

□ You must be able to collect and interpret the responses from all students in 30 seconds.

Principles of diagnostic questioning

- A response from every student
  - ABCD cards, mini-white boards

- Quick checks on understanding, not extended discussions

- Decision-driven data-collection

- The right response(s) means the right thinking
  - Distractor-driven multiple-choice questions
  - Multiple correct responses

How can we make it work for teachers and students?

Feedback

Feedback

☐ Feedback is significant for improving learning (Hattie and Yates, 2014) and is, therefore, a key part of the formative process.

☐ Learning gaps can be identified through ongoing observations and regular conversations with students in relation to the learning intention(s) and success criteria.

☐ Sadler (1989) makes it clear that simply knowing how work can be improved cannot be considered to be feedback. It has to be **actively used**.

☐ Reducing feedback to *comment only* may well seem easy, but what is evident is that it is the **quality of the comments** that make a difference to moving learning forward.

Feedback: Hattie and Timperley (2007)

Task (or product)
- Whether a response is right or wrong.
  - Correct (tick), incorrect (cross)

Feedback should cause thinking (Wiliam, 2013)

Process
- Information as to *how* students can correct their mistakes (prompts).
  - "You need to re-work your writing using the success criteria so that you are clearly giving a description."

Self-regulation
- Students monitor their work autonomously and make necessary corrections as they go along.
  - "You already know the key features of a description. Check to see if they are in yours."

Self
- Provides personality characteristics.
  - "Wow, this is brilliant!"
    - Hattie and Timperley found this level of feedback 'has too little value to result in learning gains' (2007: 97).

Feedback and long-term learning

☐ Learning requires a change in long-term memory (Kirschner et al., 2006).

☐ Whilst feedback is a key formative strategy for moving student learning forward, it is the *quality* of the feedback given which could have differing effects on pupils' LTM.

☐ For example, feedback which identifies which answers are right and wrong may be helpful to students, but **teachers who give hints as comments** (Finn and Metcalfe, 2010), such as "there are several errors here – find them, fix them" **allow students to go back and re-think, for themselves, the learning processes from the previous lesson**.

☐ As such, this allows previous information to pass from the LTM to the STM resulting in a quicker speed of retrieval for future use.

Delayed feedback

☐ Studies have shown that students retain more information in the long-term if feedback has been delayed a little (Mullet el al., 2014).

☐ This is not to say that in-class immediate feedback should be disregarded; we know students like getting immediate feedback, and this is certainly important for maintaining motivation.

☐ What needs to be taken into account, perhaps, is whether the feedback we give would cause greater *thinking* if it has been delayed.

Delayed feedback

☐ This has implications on many assessment and feedback policies within schools.

☐ Referring to Bjork's *new theory of disuse*, Wiliam suggests that 'when students have to struggle in the learning task, the quality of their *performance* on this task reduces, but the amount of *learning* that takes place increases' (2018: 139, italics my own).

☐ Within this in mind, in order to help enhance long-term learning, what is required from teachers, though, is a careful balance between the two.

Summary….

□ The interaction of all the these formative strategies not only fosters engaging learning environments, but also makes clear to teachers and students that learning is heading in the intended direction.

□ The information these strategies elicit needs to be **acted upon** to decide what to do next.

□ This is formative assessment in action.

Thank you.

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