



Better assessment in geography

Making assessment work – for you and your learners

Online CPD <http://www.geographyteachingtoday.org.uk/chartered-geographer/online-cpd-from-cgeogs/>

Objectives

- Identify the purposes and pitfalls of assessment and the features of an effective system of assessment
- Use a periodic assessment approach to make accurate judgements about student attainment and suggest improvements

Resources

- ‘Why assess?’ discussion sheet
- ‘Acceptable or not?’ activity sheet
- Periodic assessment grid (from Assessing Pupils’ Progress project)
- Student work exemplars
(from <http://curriculum.qcda.gov.uk/key-stages-3-and-4/assessment/exemplification/index.aspx>)
- Post-it notes

Session outline

- Introduce the session title and objectives
- Outline the purposes of assessment and ask teachers to ‘Think, pair, share’ the dominant purposes of assessment within their own departments
- (Re)define assessment of learning (summative assessment) and assessment for learning (formative assessment) and relate these to the broader purposes of assessment
- Give teachers an opportunity to discuss the activity ‘Acceptable or not?’ in pairs, with feedback to the group
- Introduce some of the common pitfalls of assessment in schools. Ask teachers to identify which, if any, they can relate to their own situation. Allow time for teachers to share ideas and solutions to these common problems
- Introduce the idea of PERIODIC assessment as a ‘third way’ in assessment. Use the periodic assessment grid and exemplar student materials. Ask teachers to identify what each piece of work suggests about student attainment and areas for improvement. Ask teachers to use the collection of work to make a periodic judgement about the student.
- Plenary discussion – what one thing would teachers like to do differently in their assessment as a result of the session? (Can be post-it note exercise.)

Pre-course task

The discussion sheet ‘Why assess?’ can be used as a pre-course audit-reflection task.



Further reading

<http://curriculum.qcda.gov.uk/key-stages-3-and-4/assessment/index.aspx>

<http://www.geography.org.uk/projects/makinggeographyhappen/>

http://www.geography.org.uk/download/GA_PRMGHProgressionThinkPiece.pdf

Balderstone, D. (ed) (2006) 'Section 5: Assessment' *Secondary Geography Handbook*. Sheffield. Geographical Association.

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Hopkin, J., Telfer, S. & Butt, B. (eds) (2000) *Assessment in practice: raising standards in secondary geography*. Sheffield. Geographical association.

Howes, N., and Hopkin, J. (2000) 'Improving formative assessment in geography' *Teaching Geography*, 25, 3, pp. 147-149.

Lambert, D. (2002) 'Using assessment to support learning' in Smith, M. (ed) *Teaching Geography in Secondary Schools*. London: RoutledgeFalmer, pp. 123-33.

Leat, D. and McGrane, J. (2000) 'Diagnostic and formative assessment of students' thinking', *Teaching Geography*, 25, 1, pp. 4-7.

Lomas, S. & Thompson, L. (1999) *Using KS3 assessment to raise standards in geography*. Hodder & Stoughton.

Ofsted (2003) *Good assessment practice in geography* HMI 1474

Weeden, P. (2005) 'Feedback in the geography classroom: developing the use of assessment for learning' *Teaching Geography*, 30, 3, pp. 161-163.

Weeden, P. (2010) 'Assessment, teaching and learning' in Brooks, C. (ed.) *Studying PGCE geography at M Level*. Routledge. Abingdon.

Weeden, P. & Butt, G. (2009) *Assessing progress in your key stage 3 geography curriculum*. Sheffield. Geographical Association.

Weeden, P. & Lambert, D. (2006) *Geography inside the black box*. NFER-Nelson



Notes for presenters

Slide 1 [2 mins]

Express the hope that the session will help teachers to develop a more effective approach towards assessment in school.

Explain that the Chartered Geographer network is comprised of experienced and committed teachers of geography and that the network resources are available from www.geographyteachingtoday.org.uk

Slide 2 [3 mins]

Introduce the session aims. Allow time for delegates to ask any relevant questions about these.

Explain that many of them might not be familiar with the 'periodic' approach to assessment, but that this was a new approach to assessment developed by the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency (QCDA) prior to its demise in April 2011! The approach was successfully trialled with a wide range of schools and the results of this work are available at the QCDA website <http://curriculum.qcda.gov.uk/key-stages-3-and-4/assessment/exemplification/index.aspx>

Slide 3 [10 mins]

Give pairs 2-3 minutes to discuss the pre-course task 'Why assess?' Which assessment purposes are dominant within their departments and schools?

Draw out any key messages THEN show the summary list from Weeden, P. (2010) 'Assessment, teaching and learning' in Brooks, C. (ed.) *Studying PGCE geography at M Level*.

Explain that:

- We use assessment to select students e.g. for particular sets, streams or even schools (such as grammar schools). We might use assessment to select them for particular experiences e.g. a 'gifted and talented' programme. The question arises as to whether we are using clear and objective criteria for our selection (criterion referencing) or whether we are selecting a certain proportion of the students (norm referencing) e.g. where '10% of the cohort' are identified as G&T,



- regardless of their objective level of attainment or potential relative to the population as a whole. We need to be aware of the type of selections we are making!
- An important aspect of assessment (particularly from the point of view of the public, and of employers) is to ‘certify’ students. This is ‘transitional’ assessment i.e. we provide grades, certificates and qualifications that allow students access to future courses, careers and opportunities. This implies very rigorous assessment and is extremely ‘high stakes’.
 - The ‘accountability agenda’ – whereby assessment is used to track student attainment, progress and achievement (and by implication the ‘performance’ of teachers, cohorts, schools, local authorities and even new initiatives such as Academies) is now probably the dominant purpose of assessment in British schools. It is promoted by a vast apparatus of inspection, data tracking, analysis and league tables that did not exist 20 years ago. We need to be careful that accountability is not ‘the only show in town’ when we are thinking about assessment.
 - The work of the Assessment Reform Group in the 1990s evidenced the important role of assessment *for* learning or *formative* assessment, of which more in a moment...

School systems now routinely try to meet several purposes at the same time. So it is worth unpicking this and being aware of what we are doing in schools...

Slide 4 [Slides 4 and 5 = 15 mins]

Defining assessment of learning, in the light of our discussion

A chance to (re)visit the distinction between assessment of and for learning.

[Note that this distinction cannot be taken for granted for every audience – evidence is emerging that significant numbers of teaching have either not come across, or have forgotten, the distinction.]

Note the *purposes* in this definition. Judgements are made so that:

- Students/teachers can make decisions e.g. set groups, transition to future courses
- Underachievement by students/teachers/schools can be held to account
- Students can receive accreditation for their achievements

So - accountability dominates AoL but standards are also central.

Slide 5



Define assessment for learning.

Note the purposes once again – ‘to modify the teaching and learning activities’
‘to decide where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go and how best to get there’.

Invite questions about these two definitions in order to clarify understanding. Emphasise that the key distinction is one of *purpose*, not *method*. For example, the use of ‘assessment of learning’ does not necessarily imply that grades **MUST** be used. Summative judgements are the key feature and these could have different forms (e.g. “very good work” at the end of an essay!). So summative and formative ‘practice’ can easily be mixed up (e.g. in the way we mark work) – which is the problem!

In order to ‘test’ this distinction and to find out what the impact of making it can be on classroom practice, ask pairs to complete the discussion sheet ‘Acceptable or not?’

Gather feedback from this activity.

[Be aware that, in many schools, the idea that teacher intervention should be significantly different when summative assessment is taking place has been blurred to the point of disappearing. Equally, the use of routine and formative work to report student progress and hold teachers to account is also widespread.]

Slide 6 [10 mins]

There are currently a number ‘issues in assessment’ nationally – this list is not comprehensive but it is based on evidence. Many of these are the ones identified by Black and Wiliams and the Assessment Reform Group! And several have become more problematic for many schools and departments in recent years e.g. the frequency of reporting in KS3, the reliance on ‘numbers’ and the ‘spurious accuracy’ of using the split versions of the NC levels from the Attainment Target for geography (which was designed only as a summative, best-fit tool).

Give pair or small group discussion time of 5 minutes maximum to share the key issues in their departments and any suggestions for minimising the issue e.g. including a wider range of assessment tasks in order to reduce reliance on written tasks for assessment.

[Notes for presenters]

- **FREQUENCY** - In many schools, geography departments have to report on KS3 levels (or GCSE grades) every 5-6 weeks. In some cases, these reports are compared with ‘target’ levels created by drawing a straight line of smooth progress from prior attainment (based on KS2 SATs, for example) to the end of the key stage. In extreme cases, no allowance is made for uneven progress, spiky attainment, strengths and weaknesses or indeed for ‘learning’. Some school



- systems do not allow attainment data to be entered that is below the 'target', which rather makes a mockery of the idea of professional assessment!
- **RANGE** – the separation of 'assessment' from 'learning' in some departments inevitably means the 'end of unit assessment/test'. In these circumstances, the range of evidence considered in making judgements about attainment is very narrow – with an over-reliance on written work and knowledge and understanding which is specific to the unit (see below)
 - **MODULAR AND LONGITUDINAL TARGETS** – many departments find it difficult to use assessment to set improvement targets that have meaning for the next 'unit' of work. This is sometimes because 'the assessment' always takes place at the end of a module. It might also be because the assessment focuses on the content of the module, rather than the generic geography skills/attributes that are needed for future learning.
 - **SPLIT LEVELS** – note that the Attainment Target for geography was written as a summative 'best fit' tool for the end of the key stage. Its language is therefore broad and sometimes abstract. Using it for 'fine detail' assessment is fraught with hazards – even more so when schools insist on importing a method from core testing – the split levels. This 'spurious accuracy' assumes that teachers can assess individual pieces of work on what is often a 24-point scale (8 levels split typically into 3 sub-levels). The simplest tests of such a system show it to be a 'professional hoax'. For example, would different teachers make the same judgements about work (the '*comparability*' test)?
 - **MOTIVATION** – the work of Black and Wiliams showed very clearly that 'over-reporting' demotivates learners. Lower attainers are put off by their 'lower grades'. Higher attainers quickly realise that they can reach higher (or highest) levels and lack motivation to push themselves further. Ironically, many students and parents now constantly clamour for levels and grades – a culture of 'grade dependency' has been created in many schools. Black and Wiliams suggested that where improvement advice (through AfL) is overwhelmed by summative judgements, the focus on learning is lost.

Slide 7 [Slides 7 and 8 = 5 mins]

Use the painting analogy to show how examining the fine detail can tell us things about the artist e.g. brushwork and technique, but that standing back allows us to look at the 'whole picture'. The purpose of a 'public view' is to see the picture in context or to celebrate the achievement of the artist.

So too with assessment in school:

Day to day assessment:

- Includes Assessment for learning approaches, peer- and self-assessment. It provides immediate feedback but tends to be focused on *this* piece of work



- Gives a close up focus on what pupils need to do next, but they don't always get a sense of where they are overall- is the feedback just relevant in this case or in general?

Periodic-

- Periodic allows teachers to look at a broader profile- not just at the end of a unit, but perhaps termly or a couple of times a year
- Gives a broader view of progress for teacher and learner taking into account what they can do over a **range** of work; shows they can transfer skills and apply them in different contexts.
- Allows judgements of progress to be linked more meaningfully with national standards.
- Can be seen as trying to 'square the circle' and inhabit a middle ground between AfL and AoL, in order to promote learning but provide accountability.

Transitional-

- Involves a formal recognition of achievement at key points (e.g. end of year, end of key stage, option choices); may be reported to parents/carers and next teacher/school
- Very much a 'summative' approach

Slide 8

The key tool for periodic assessment is the Assessing Pupil Progress grid. These are now commonly used in maths, English and science (especially in primary schools).

Distribute the full document to teachers but give time only for skim reading it.

Note that this will not now be rolled out nationally for geography, but that it can still be a useful framework for thinking about standards and progression.

- Note the three column headings. These 'assessment foci' provide clear objectives against which learners can be expected to make progress.
- The individual statements (criteria) are drawn from the National Curriculum Level Descriptors i.e. the standards set out are the same, but have been rearranged to make progression clearer.

Slide 9 [Slides 9-11 = 10 mins]

Show teachers the first piece of work from a 'collection' (this is genuine KS3 work from the project site <http://curriculum.qcda.gov.uk/key-stages-3-and-4/assessment/exemplification/index.aspx>)



Read out the CONTEXT of the work:

Patterns of chewing gum around the school site

The unit of work explored an issue that was causing concern at the school - chewing gum. The overall intention was for pupils to know and understand the pattern of production and disposal of this product.

For this activity, pupils investigated the pattern of chewing gum litter around the school site. They worked in groups to collect information but worked individually to display and analyse the data. They used quadrats to measure the density of chewing gum at locations they selected around the school and displayed this in map and graph form before writing about their results.

Ask them to tick or shade in ANY criteria they feel this piece of work provides evidence of. [Note that you might need to discourage tendency to 'level' the work rather than identify what it shows. You might also need to deflect questions about the age of the student etc.]

Slide 10

Show the second piece of work. The context is the same.

Allow teachers to shade in or confirm any judgements (e.g. the student is now showing a wider *range* of skills).

[Information for presenters]

For these two pieces of work (the map and graph), the teacher made the following comments:

Assessment Focus 2 (interconnections and change) - Criteria 4b and 4c (i.e. the second and third bullet points)

The pupil identifies how people can damage the environment through the dropping of gum and has offered some reasons for the patterns observed.

Assessment Focus 3 (Enquiry and communication) – Criteria 4b 4c

This pupil shows group work skills by selecting locations for data collection in the field and making appropriate use of a fieldwork technique. He displays primary data in appropriate forms that allow simple patterns to be identified.

Next steps

The pupil could make better use of his data in describing patterns. To do so, the pupil needs to refer to evidence in describing areas of high and low density.



The pupil could develop greater independence and learn to ask his own questions about patterns of data, moving on from his teacher's suggestions.

Slide 11

Read out the context:

“For this activity, pupils responded to the issue by writing to their head teacher to summarise the problem they had investigated and suggest solutions.”

Allow further shading of criteria met by this student.

NOW ask teachers to look at the grid they have completed AS A WHOLE:

- What is their overall (periodic) judgement of the student's level of attainment?
- What does this student need to do to improve?

[Information for presenters]

For this piece of work, the teacher made the following comments:

Assessment Focus 2 (interconnections and change) - Criteria 4b and 4c

The pupil's letter describes patterns of gum around the school site and offers some reasons for this pattern. The influence of human behaviour on the environment is recognised and ways in which improvements to the environment can be made are identified.

Assessment Focus 3 (Enquiry and communication) – Criteria 4c

The pupil communicates using appropriate language and presentation. Findings are communicated clearly.

Next steps

The pupil could begin to recognise the range of views of the issue of chewing gum (by teachers, pupils, cleaners and others) and use this to better understand the nature of the problem. His conclusions could be more plausible if linked to the viewpoints of different groups and ideas about cost, enforcement etc.

Note how this exercise illustrates the key principles of periodic assessment:

- Teachers design 'collections' of evidence using as wide a range as possible.
- The 'work' is not the only evidence. In this example, we have evidence that the student undertook fieldwork and used suitable techniques
- No attempt is made to level individual pieces of work – it the overall 'profile' that is used as the summative tool.



Slide 12

Use this slide only if needed:

It provides a visual illustration of the way in which periodic assessment works. Individual criteria are met for selected pieces of evidence. In this case, a periodic judgement would be very tentative, as there is relatively little work completed. However, a summative judgement on this student would be a 'high level 4' (i.e. the student is always achieving at level 4 criteria consistently and level 5 criteria occasionally).

The APP table:

- Allows 'progress' to be seen as a climbing frame, not as a ladder
- Can take account of the 'spiky' nature of attainment for most students
- Can help to wean students off the 'drug' of levelling everything and teachers away from the 'spurious accuracy' of sub-levels

Periodic assessment **SHOULD** allow reference to national standards and accountability whilst providing accurate and valid assessment which is tied to useful advice for students.

Slide 13 [slides 13 and 14 = 5 mins]

If time, allow teachers to complete a 'post-it' note and collate a set of ideas on a flip chart or wall.

Otherwise, allow paired or whole-group discussion.

Slide 14

Show these points as teachers write out their post-it notes for their own personal targets.

Hopefully, suggestions from the group and their responses from the input will have helped to identify some practical 'actions' that we can take to meet the aspirations or features identified on this slide.