

Assessment and Learning

Danica Gondová, Žilina University, Slovakia

danica.gondova@fhv.uniza.sk

Abstract

Assessment has got many purposes and may serve various formative and summative functions. In our paper we deal with assessment for learning which is process-oriented, helps learners improve and enhance their learning and understand it better. In order to achieve that learners need to know their learning objectives and the criteria which are used to assess their performance, they should be given a lot of descriptive feedback and have many opportunities to self-assess. In our study we analyze if assessment for learning is implemented at gymnasias in Slovakia, how students are assessed, if the focus of assessment is on the product (summative assessment) or on the process (formative assessment) and if teachers facilitate self-assessment. The results which we arrived at indicate that assessment for learning is not done at the observed schools, the feedback students get on their learning is evaluative and as such it does not help them improve their learning, succeed in achieving the objectives and learn how to self-assess.

Keywords

assessment for learning, sharing objectives and criteria, descriptive feedback, self- and peer-assessment

Introduction

It is a self-evident proposition that assessment is an integral part of the learning process and it influences the teaching and learning activities. Traditionally, assessment is used as a tool of measuring the products of learning and providing information about learners' achievements, but in addition to that it should, first and foremost, become an integral part of the learning process and support and enhance learning. Assessment should become a tool which facilitates learning thanks to effective, descriptive feedback that helps students review their learning and make further progress. In our study we discuss differences between assessment of learning and assessment for learning and analyze how assessment for learning is implemented in some schools in Slovakia.

1 Assessment in schools

Assessment has got many purposes which may often be contradictory, it may motivate students, provide information to their parents or some authorities about their achievements, support learners' effort to participate in the learning processes, develop learners learning styles, diagnose their problems, feed back

on their learning, enhance their learning, compare learners with each other, measure if learners have achieved a certain standard, etc. P. Black (1998, in Earl, 2003, p.12) identified “three broad purposes of assessment in schools: support learning; report achievement of individuals for certification, progress and transfer; and satisfy the demands for public accountability.”

1.1 Assessment of learning

The kind of assessment that is easy to observe and comment on is summative assessment which is also referred to as assessment of learning. The objectives of summative assessment are to judge or accredit the work of students or the outcomes of the learning process after a certain period of time. It also measures how much students have learned and if they meet the required standards.

Students understand summative assessment as the responsibility of the teacher and usually do not participate in it: the teacher decides what is going to be taught and assessed, when and how it is going to be done, and the teacher also marks the outcomes of tests or exams.

This kind of assessment often detects differences between students and ranks them according to their achievements, but only few of them are able to build on their success and learn more by themselves if they are assessed summatively. According to Stiggins (2007, p. 23), “for students on winning streaks assessment results provide continual evidence of success” whereas “for those on losing streaks it provides continual evidence of failure”. Failing students gradually lose all their confidence and give way to resignation. That’s the reason why assessment is a kind of powerful ‘weapon’ in the hands of the teacher.

As an inevitable part of students’ learning, assessment also defines what is worth learning, particularly if students are only assessed summatively. It is well-known that students only learn what is being assessed. In this way it directs students’ learning, teaching as such does not. This is another reason why it has a decisive, powerful backwash effect on the learning process.

However, this kind of assessment does not differentiate learners and does not take their needs into consideration. Because it only focuses on the products of the learning it does not help learners understand the objectives of the learning process and what they need to do to achieve the objectives and therefore, it does not enhance learning, does not serve a formative function and does not contribute to learners’ autonomy which is the ultimate objective of today’s education.

1.2 Assessment for learning

The objective to help children become autonomous learners and thus prepare them for lifelong learning has changed the perceptions of the learning process as well as of assessment and it has been acknowledged that assessment may also

have a formative function. According to Scharle & Szabó (2010, p.3) autonomous learners should be able to “consciously monitor their own progress, and make an effort to use available opportunities to their benefit”.

In order to learn how to monitor their progress, learners need to understand the objectives of the learning process and the criteria against which the outcomes are going to be measured. This can only be achieved if teaching and learning are understood as interactive processes and if assessment is interactive as well, which means that the teacher and students are partners in assessment. The interactive approach towards assessment makes it possible for learners to participate in it actively and use it as a tool for learning, which leads them to autonomy and responsibility for their own learning.

Pedder & James (2012, p. 35) stress that the promotion of autonomous learning “is a key principle underlying purposes and practices of assessment of learning. When teachers develop deep understanding of such principles and find practical ways of realizing the potential of assessment for learning for promoting learning autonomy, they reflect the ‘spirit’ of assessment for learning.” Assessment for learning, by some authors also referred to as formative assessment, improves and enhances learning considerably, which is illustrated by a lot of research (Black & William, 1998, p. 61).

From what has been said, it follows that assessment for learning is not a set of techniques that can be used in the classrooms without any further changes. It requires changes in the behaviour of teachers and students and their roles. Assessment for learning must become part of the learning process, which means it must be done continuously during the process of learning, not at its end. Its main objective is to improve learning and teaching through frequent interactive assessment of learners’ progress. It also aims at identifying learners’ needs and adjusting the teaching process accordingly. Assessment only becomes formative and enhances the learning processes when “the evidence is actually used to adapt the teaching to meet student needs” (Black & William, 1998 p. 140), which means when the teacher differentiates learners.

William & Thompson (2007, in Pedder & James, 2012, p. 33) have identified five strategies which help the teacher promote assessment for learning in lessons:

- a) clarifying and understanding learning intentions and sharing criteria for success;
- b) promoting and supporting effective classroom discussions and developing activities and tasks that elicit evidence of learning;
- c) providing feedback that moves learners forward;
- d) activating students as pedagogic resources for one another;

e) activating students as the owners of their own learning.

In the next part of our paper we are going to deal with these strategies in more detail.

First, it is necessary to stress that assessment only promotes learning if it helps “students answer three questions: *Where am I going? Where am I now? and How can I close the gap?*” (Chappuis, 2005, p. 39). In other words, students need to understand what their learning objectives are, they need to be given constant feedback on their achievements and should be involved in self-assessment activities to be able to set their own goals, and finally they should be able to understand what they have achieved so far and what else they need to do to be able to achieve the objectives and what learning strategies they need to use to achieve them. Gardner (2012, p.3) defines assessment for learning as “the process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners and their teachers, to identify where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go and how best to get there” and summarizes the principles for assessment for learning as follows:

Assessment for learning

- Is part of effective planning;
- Focuses on how students learn;
- Is central to classroom practice;
- Is sensitive and constructive;
- Fosters motivation;
- Promotes understanding of goals and criteria;
- Helps learners know how to improve;
- Develops the capacity for self-assessment;
- Recognizes all educational achievement (ARG, 2002, in Gardner, 2012, p.3).

As mentioned above, assessment for learning can best be implemented in learner-centred activities which make it possible to focus on what students are going to learn, not on what the teacher is going to teach. In addition to that, learners should be involved “in their own learning not just through reflection but also as co-constructors and co-negotiators of their learning” (Spendlove, 2009, p. x).

Another concept that is central to assessment for learning is learner differentiation. Since learners’ learning styles differ, they all have different needs and require different kinds of support, scaffolding and intervention to be able to meet the requirements and produce the expected outcomes.

When planning lessons teachers should also think about how they are going to gather data from the students showing how they understand and apply new language (grammar, vocabulary) or how well they develop a skill (reading, listening, speaking, writing). That means they need to plan such activities or tasks

which elicit evidence of learning on which feedback can be given either by the teacher or students themselves.

The feedback students get on their work should move them forward, i.e. should highlight their strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, evaluative feedback is not sufficient, learners need to be given descriptive feedback which is crucial for learning. It is not enough to tell a student that his work is good or not satisfactory or just give him a mark; it is also necessary to tell him what is good about his work and what needs to be improved. "The quality of the feedback, rather than its quantity, determines its effectiveness" (Chappuis, 2005, p. 41).

Feedback is only effective if it helps students make progress and if it helps them find out what to do in order to improve their achievement during the process of learning not at its end. It is also necessary to stress that both the teacher and students have to understand that the main purpose of feedback is to facilitate learning, not to criticise a student.

Another condition of successful implementation of assessment of learning is students' self-assessment and peer-assessment. In order to be able to do that and understand assessment, students need to be trained to self-assess and set goals for improvement. The first step in this process is the understanding of learning objectives and criteria used to assess their performances. That of course often means that the objectives need to be "translated" into the language students can understand. When assessing some work, especially at the beginning of the process, students may imitate the teacher's descriptive feedback which serves as a kind of sample. They may also use the set of criteria the teacher uses to assess their work, e.g. the set of criteria used to assess speaking or writing tasks in the Maturita examination. They may be asked to think about which of the descriptors describes their own performance the best and what they need to work on to improve.

Because it is well-known that it is much easier to assess someone else's work, students may be invited first to assess the work of their peers. When thinking about their strengths and weaknesses, they learn to understand their own much better.

When monitoring their own progress or that of their peers', after some training they can use assessment criteria both for formative assessment (How am I doing? What can I do very well? What needs to be changed? How can I improve? What do I need to work on more?) and summative assessment (they can give themselves or their peers a mark). In this way they can take an active part in the assessment, but the teacher needs to think very carefully about at which stage s/he can use students' grades (marks) as part of the official summative assessment.

When applied properly, the assessment for learning becomes a “process used by teachers and students to recognise and respond to student learning in order to enhance that learning, during the learning” (Cowie & Bell, 1999 p. 103). Moreover, students become resources for one another and through better understanding they gradually become owners of their own learning and change from consumers of assessment to self-assessors.

As mentioned above, the impact of classroom assessment practices on learners is enormous, which is documented in many studies. Research documents that assessment may influence learning outcomes negatively, but when used appropriately, it enhances learners’ achievements. Some research even suggests that if formative assessment is implemented regularly, students’ achievements are 70 – 80% better even in standardized tests (Leahy & Wiliam, 2012, p. 67).

Black & Wiliam (2009, p. 9) state that “practice in a classroom is formative to the extent that evidence about student achievement is elicited, interpreted, and used by teachers, learners, or their peers, to make decisions about the next steps in instruction that are likely to be better, or better founded than the decisions they would have taken in the absence of the evidence that was elicited.” From this it follows that the decisions are not only made by the teacher, as they are in a traditional classroom, but also by learners who thus become co-creators of the learning process.

2 Implementation of assessment for learning at schools in the Žilina region

In the research which we carried out in 2009 – 2012 at some schools in the Žilina region, we aimed to find out how English teachers assess students in their lessons; if the focus of assessment is on the learning process or the product; and if teachers facilitate self- and peer-assessment. During the research we observed 35 English lessons at gymnasia and another 30 English lessons at primary and lower-secondary schools (fifteen lessons at each level). 45 out of these lessons have also been videoed for the purposes of more detailed studies. In addition to that we interviewed fifteen teachers and asked another fifty teachers to fill in questionnaires.

Since we have not got space to analyze all the results in this qualitative study, we will only focus on the results that we got when we observed those 20 lessons at gymnasia which were not videoed and we will also use some teachers’ comments from the questionnaires or interviews.

2.1 Understanding the objectives and criteria

In order to put assessment for learning in practice it is necessary for teachers to understand assessment globally and to formulate the learning objectives

correctly. It is also necessary for students to understand the objectives of their learning which should be presented to them in a learner-friendly language so that they understand *where they are going*.

Thirteen out of twenty teachers (65%) presented the objectives of lessons at the beginning and, from the point of view of the formulation and the choice of vocabulary we believe that most of the objective might have been clear to students (two teachers used words *promise*, *obligation* and *permission*, which might have been too difficult for students). However, none of the teachers checked if it was really so and none of them discussed the objectives and how they could be achieved with students in more detail. Six teachers did not present any objective at all and one teacher, instead of presenting learning objectives talked about what activities they were going to do in the lesson (first some listening and then some exercises from the book).

We also observed that in sixteen out of twenty lessons, the techniques students were asked to do in the lessons did not always help learners to achieve the objective which was presented by the teacher. For example, in one of the lessons students were supposed to practise their listening comprehension skills, but while listening to the text they were allowed to follow its script in their course-books. In another lesson the objective was to talk about permissions and obligations, but the teacher focused on the form of modals throughout the lesson. It wasn't until the end of the lesson that the students were asked which of the verbs on the board express permission and which express obligation. In another lesson, students were supposed to practise reading comprehension skills, but the teacher asked them to underline and explain unknown vocabulary first, translate the text and only then do the comprehension tasks. In one of the lessons, the objective presented by the teacher was to talk about the internet, but students were studying vocabulary connected with the topic during the whole lesson and did not speak at all, etc. If objectives are presented in this way, it may be misleading and confusing for students because the information they get about the objective of their learning is not correct.

Another problem was that the objective of the lesson was only mentioned once in the lesson. It was done very briefly at the beginning and afterwards it was 'forgotten'. Only one of the teachers came back to it at the end of the lesson and asked 'which collocations students have learned in the lesson'. Otherwise, students were not reminded about objectives during lessons and did not discuss if they were achieving them or not.

According to the principles of assessment for learning, students should not only be aware of the objective of the lesson but they should also know the criteria which describe a successful performance. However, these were not presented to

learners in any form by any of the twenty teachers. That of course causes many problems because students are not able to judge if they meet the requirements or not and have to rely on the judgment of the teacher. For example, in one of the lessons the objective was to talk about traffic and students were asked to work in groups and describe a picture. Students were not given any assessment criteria which they could use while they were preparing for the task which means they didn't know what the objective was. The teacher was monitoring their work, but did not comment on it. Afterwards he asked one student to describe the picture in front of the whole class. The teacher didn't invite others to comment on the performance and he didn't comment either. Actually, the description the student produced was on A2 level (the range of vocabulary and the range of grammatical structures were very limited), which means he did not achieve the objective, but was not informed about that.

In conclusion, it seems that even if teachers try to set the objectives, this is understood as a formality and teachers do not consider the information about the objectives important for the process of learning. The criteria which describe a successful performance are not presented to students at all. That of course means that students do not know what is expected from them and what they need to achieve. This is also true if students have an opportunity to work in small groups and produce outcomes that may serve as evidence of their learning because the objectives are not clear to them and they do not know what a successful performance should look like. Since they do not understand the objectives and do not know the criteria of success, they do not understand the assessment and thus miss out on opportunities to learn.

2.2 Evidence of learning

As mentioned above, one of the pre-conditions of the successful implementation of assessment for learning is to plan activities that make it possible to elicit evidence of learning for every student in the classroom. In our opinion that means that students should be aware of how much they already know about the given topic so that they know where their starting point is and how much they need to learn. They should also be given as many opportunities as possible to work in pairs or small groups so that each of them has to produce the expected outcome either orally or in a written form. That makes it possible for the teacher to observe the work of every individual student, comment on his/her achievement and provide him/her with understandable information that they can use to improve their performance immediately. Such support also helps students to achieve success and thus they become more confident and motivated.

Only in four of the twenty observed lessons, students had an opportunity to think about how much they already know about the topic (*Where am I now?*), e.g.

how much vocabulary they know connected with a topic, how much they can remember about a grammatical structure, how they can express permissions, which strategies they can use when doing listening or reading comprehension tasks, etc. These questions help students link their previous learning to the new objective and activate their schemata, which makes learning easier.

As to the outcomes, these can be produced by students either in tasks done as whole-class tasks or in small-group tasks. 86% of all tasks teachers asked students to do were done with the whole class. In that case, the answers are only given by a few students who can work fast and are usually high-achievers. This does not make it possible for the teacher to elicit evidence of learning for everyone and gather information about how individual students learn and where they have problems. Students do not get the information about their own learning either. Moreover, only some of the students are active and not everyone has sufficient space to really do the task – the task is solved before some of them can even try to think about it. One of the teachers explained that she insisted on students raising their hands and waiting for her permission to speak so that all of them are involved in solving the task and have some time to think about it. The problem is that even if she waits for everyone to raise their hands, the evidence is only produced by one learner.

In several lessons, we also observed another problem: sometimes the teacher sets a task and from the students' reaction it is clear that they don't really understand what they are supposed to be doing because they do not react to teacher's questions in any way. However, instead of explaining the task again and giving learners some space to do the task and achieve the objective, the teacher answers the questions for them and moves on. This indicates teachers' product-orientation – they are more interested in students having the correct answers than they are in the learning process.

The product-orientation was also clear when students were asked to do listening or reading comprehension tasks. Only three teachers encouraged students to check their answers in pairs, otherwise students were asked to work individually. When they finished, the answers were checked with the whole class, but none of the teachers asked for evidence or discussed the reasons for the answers with students. If the answers were not correct, the key was provided by the teacher. Such feedback, however, is not sufficient because it does not help learners to understand their weaknesses, improve their understanding of texts and enhance learning.

Our research results show, that only eleven out of twenty observed teachers implemented group work and pair work, but these small-group activities only took 14% of the overall teaching time and the rest of it was spent doing up-front

tasks. From what we have observed, we can also make the conclusion that even if some teachers try to apply small-group activities, they do not really understand principles of group- or pair-work. First, they set a task, but do not explain to students what a good outcome is, do not discuss any assessment criteria or give them a sample. As it has already been discussed above, students do not know what is expected from them and without realizing it, they may produce outcomes that do not meet the criteria. However, that also means that they cannot assess their own performance, and have to rely on the teacher's assessment without really understanding it. Moreover, out of twenty teachers only one observed students' work while they were working in small groups and helped them if they had problems or if they asked her for help. The others did not comment on students' work and very often they did not join the groups at all. That of course means that they could not collect any evidence about students' learning.

Moreover, we observed three teachers who set a task for pair work, but did not interfere when students were working individually. Obviously, students did not understand the meaning of pair work and were not really used to doing it; and the teacher ignored their decision to work on their own. This shows that neither the teacher nor the students understand why they should work in small groups and how it can enhance their learning.

To sum up, up-front tasks do not give all students an opportunity to produce assessable outcomes because the answer can only be given by one of them. Some students do not join whole-class work. This might be because some of them do not have time to do so, other just do not care. But even if students do activities in small groups, they do not really benefit from them because the feedback they get is not sufficient to enhance learning.

2.3 Differentiating learners

If assessment for learning is to be applied successfully, it is also necessary to meet students' needs and set tasks that are achievable for them. In other words, it is necessary to differentiate learners. However, in the observed lessons, only one of the teachers tried to prepare activities that would follow some of the principles of differentiation. Otherwise, all tasks students had to do were set for all of them and all students were expected to do them within the same time constraints. Only one teacher respected the fact that learners do not work at the same speed and when a group finished doing an unrehearsed role-play, she gave them another set of stimuli so that they could continue working and developing their speaking skills while the others were still working on the first one.

In the interviews the teachers mentioned that they do realize differences between students but their attitudes towards different needs of learners vary. Five teachers said that their expectations differ according to how good or weak

students are. Low-achievers are not expected to do more challenging tasks and their language errors are tolerated. Their teachers have given up on them and do not even try to help them achieve the objectives. Even if they set a task for everyone, they do not expect low-achievers to do anything. They do not help them with the task and so these students experience failure and are left behind. Actually, none of the teachers thought about how they could help these students learn more. The other teachers mentioned that they plan their lessons so that they meet the needs of average students. They were all aware of the fact they were neglecting the weakest and the strongest students but insisted they did not have time to do any activities with them. As to talented learners, three teachers said they are satisfied with having such students in class because *talented learners can answer all questions and do all tasks quickly*, which makes teachers' work easier. However, none of the teachers was thinking about how to move these learners forward and help them learn even more.

Eighteen teachers believe that if children do not do very well in English lessons it is mainly because they do not do their homework and do not study at home regularly. They also blame parents for not helping children study for school. Only one of the teachers stressed the fact that a lot depends on the teacher who needs to teach strategies and study skills so that children can manage to do what is expected from them even if they have to work on their own. Learning strategies is another important pre-condition of assessment for learning because strategies help learners understand *how* they can reach the objectives.

2.4 Descriptive feedback

Providing descriptive feedback that moves learners forward is another condition of the successful implementation of assessment for learning. During the twenty lessons which we observed we could hear a lot of evaluative and affective feedback. Teachers either praised students for their answers or they indicated incorrectness. However, descriptive feedback was practically non-existent. What we also found a problem was that learners were not given space to discuss the difficulties they encountered when doing tasks and teachers' feedback was product-oriented, i.e. the teachers were interested in the answers not in how students arrived at them. For example, when they did a listening or reading comprehension task, the teachers checked their answers against the key but did not discuss the evidence. Neither did students have a chance to listen to a section of the text which they could not understand for the third time in order to try to locate the needed information and thus learn more about strategies which might help them be more successful.

The feedback on the outcomes produced during pair-work or group-work was also product-oriented. If students were asked to read out their answers to some exercises, teachers expressed agreement or disagreement with their answers without any explanatory comments. If students were asked to practice a role-play or a dialogue during pair-work, nineteen teachers did not comment on their work at all and when they performed the role-play or dialogue in front of the whole class, it was always evaluated by the teacher as *good*. Even though affective feedback and praise may motivate students, they do not really move them forward and that is why it is necessary to use affective feedback reasonably. Only one of the teachers commented on students' work while they were working in groups. She was helping them formulate correct sentences in their dialogues and supplied the vocabulary they needed to express some ideas.

Another problem we encountered was the way teachers organized feedback on speaking activities done in small groups. Students were asked to perform rehearsed role-plays or dialogues in front of the whole class, but the students who were supposed to listen to these performances were not involved in the assessment of the performances and became passive listeners, which often resulted in their disinterest in the performances of their peers.

Some researchers (Black & William, 2012, p. 19) argue that summative testing may also be used for formative purposes to enhance learning both before after the test. When students prepare for a test, they can decide themselves which language structures that the test will focus on they feel confident about and which of them they would like to review. After the test has been marked by the teacher, students' may be asked to do those tasks which caused the most problems again and discuss the difficulties before the marked test is given to them. More advanced learners may even be asked to write tasks for each other and then mark them. Even though during our research, we could observe four teachers assessing students summatively, none of them used these opportunities for formative purposes.

From the teachers' responses in the interview it follows that they often gather information about students' learning through progress or achievement tests or oral exams which are very often administered at the beginning of a lesson. However, they only use these techniques to build their lessons or to measure how students have mastered the subject matter they were supposed to learn rather than to make useful assessment which students could benefit from. In lessons they give students a lot of affective and evaluative feedback which in itself does not help students improve.

3.5 Self- and peer-assessment

“Self-assessment is essential to learning because students can only achieve a learning goal if they understand that goal and can assess what they need to do to reach it” (Sadler, 1989; in Black & William, 2012, p. 18). Therefore, it is essential that students understand the criteria used to assess their work. They also need to understand the objectives of their learning and what they need to do to achieve the objectives successfully. Various studies on assessment for learning stress the importance of regular student self- and peer assessment as part of assessment for learning. It should involve the analysis of one’s work as well as some reflection on one’s learning strategies. As mentioned above, if this is done, students become resources for one another and they gradually become the owners of their own learning.

This was also confirmed by one of the teachers in the interview who expressed the opinion that students *can explain the subject matter to each other in their own language – often better than I can do it. I use pair work if I want to find out if they really understand the subject matter.* Obviously, she understands that the feedback provided by students may be valuable for students’ learning and may really help them improve.

Despite these facts, we have to state that the observed teachers did not encourage self- or peer-assessment systematically even though we could observe some attempts. In one of the lessons, after students have performed the dialogues which they had prepared in pairs, the teacher invited a student to choose the best dialogue. The student chose one but did not give any reasons for her decision. The teacher agreed with her, but did not explain either.

In another lesson, the teacher invited students to listen to rehearsed role-plays and take notes of students’ mistakes. However, she did not specify which mistakes they should focus on, which might be the reason why students did not respond at all. Another teacher asked students to count their correct answers and praise themselves if they deserved it. However, they were not invited to discuss difficulties and no suggestions for improvement were offered.

Conclusion

In order to answer the question how students are assessed in English lessons we need to say that those lessons which we observed were dominated by evaluative feedback. Because evaluative feedback is product-oriented, students are not provided any information about how much they already know, they do not learn how to link their new knowledge with the previous one or how they can improve their learning and succeed in achieving the objectives, and they are not presented any learning strategies that might enhance their learning.

Another problem is that teachers choose to do tasks with the whole class,

which does not make it possible for them to gather evidence of students' learning. If learners do not have a chance to actively do every task, they cannot produce their own assessable outcomes and in that case they themselves do not know how much they have learned in the lesson. Many teachers do not really expect students to learn much at school, and expect them to study at home on their own or with the help of their parents. If that does not happen, teachers blame students for the failure.

Teachers generally do not facilitate self- and peer-assessment. Even if they present learning objectives to students, they do it rather superficially and do not check if students really understand them. Moreover, they do not provide students with any assessment criteria and do not give them a sample or a description of a successful achievement. Therefore, it is hardly possible for students to self-assess because they do not know what should actually be assessed. If teachers provide any feedback on grammatical or lexical activities, they do invite other students to correct mistakes, but all the feedback that is given is evaluative, i.e. focused on the correct answer. We did not observe any formative assessment when students were doing activities whose objectives were to develop their receptive or productive skills. Sometimes, students were asked to correct the answers given by their peers, but they were not encouraged to discuss problems or difficulties or reasons for different answers. Feedback on speaking activities was done without the involvement of the other students. That makes students rely on the teacher's assessment, which stops them from thinking about and understanding their learning process.

At present, "language teaching is being shaped by several important ideas. First, the shift toward a cognitive paradigm means that *learning* has taken precedence over *teaching*. What the student learns is the important outcome of the teaching-learning process, not what the teacher teaches" (Lynne, 2008, p. 379). In order to change the current situation, it is necessary to move from assessment of learning (summative assessment) to assessment for learning (formative assessment) and balance them. Students should be informed about learning objectives and success criteria so that they understand where they are and where they are going, but also what they need to do and which learning strategies they need to choose to get there. In order to achieve that they should be involved in small-group work which enables them to produce evidence of their learning, and use the knowledge of their peers and their own to improve and enhance their own learning. They should also be allowed to assess themselves and their peers because assessment deepens the understanding of the learning process. Teachers should respect students' needs, set tasks which are achievable for them and enable all of them to experience success. That is very

important because success motivates and enables learning.

References

- BLACK, P., & WILIAM, D. (1998). *Inside the Black Box: Raising standards through classroom assessment*. London: King's College London School of Education.
- BLACK, P., J., WILIAM, D. (2009). Developing the theory of formative assessment. *Educational Assessment, Evaluation and Accountability*, 21 (1), 5-31.
- BLACK, P. J., & WILIAM, D. (2012). Assessment for learning in the classroom. In Gardner, J. (Ed.), *Assessment and Learning*. (pp. 11-32). London: SAGE Publication Ltd.
- CHAPPUIS, J. (2005). Helping students understand assessment. *Educational Leadership. Assessment to Promote Learning*. 63 (3), 39-43.
- COWIE, B., & BELL, B. (1999). A model of formative assessment in science education. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy and Practice*, Volume 6, Number 1, 1 March 1999, 101-116.
- EARL, L. M. (2003). *Assessment As Learning*. California: Corwin Press.
- FRY, H. K., & MARSHALL, S. (2003). *A Handbook for teaching & learning in higher education*. London, Routledge Falmer.
- GARDNER, J. (Ed.) (2012). *Assessment and Learning*. London: SAGE.
- LYNNE, T. (2008). *A Course for Teaching English Learners*, New York: Pearson Education, Inc.
- LEAHY, S., & WILLIAM, D. (2012). From Teachers to Schools: Scaling Up Professional Development for Formative Assessment. In Gardner, J. (Ed.), *Assessment and Learning*. (pp. 49-71). London: SAGE Publication Ltd.
- PEDDER, J. & JAMES, M. (2012). Professional learning as a condition for assessment for learning. In Gardner, J. (Ed.), *Assessment and Learning*. (pp. 33-48). London: SAGE Publication Ltd.
- SCHARLE, Á. & SZABÓ, A. (2010). *Learner Autonomy. A guide to developing learner responsibility*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- SPENDLOVE, D. (2009). *Putting Assessment for Learning into Practice*. London: Continuum.
- STIGGINS, R. (2007). Assessment through the student's eyes. *Educating the Whole Child*. May 2007, 64 (8), 22-26.

Acknowledgment: This work was supported in part by a grant from the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic – project KEGA No. 985ŽU-4/2011.

Contact

PhDr. Danica Gondová, PhD.,
Katedra anglického jazyka a literatúry FHV ŽU
Žilinská univerzita, Univerzitná 8251/1, 010 26 Žilina, Slovakia
danica.gondova@fhv.uniza.sk