# Assessment for REALLY learning

If "assessment for learning" was **really** assessment for learning (rather than assessment for performance, assessment for teaching . etc – see Watkins, 2003), we would be able to see:

a set of practices which focussed on what learners do, rather than what teachers do, and

a set of processes which promote the best of what we know about learning.

If this were the case we could even see assessment becoming a learning experience in itself - about oneself, about oneself in formally assessed contexts, and even about learning.

Possibilities for practice (using four headings from Watkins et al 2007) might include:

Active

The active *use* of assessments (and indeed the active preparation for assessment events) might follow a Do-Review-Learn-Apply model of learning from activity. It would add a necessary focus on process, no matter what sort of product was being created.
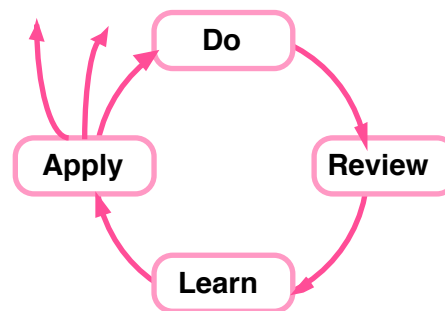
In the current UK context "Learning objectives" (which are mostly performance objectives) which are "shared with" (i.e. told to) learners can be reclaimed in a more active manner. Considerable engagement is evident when learners are asked to process a provided learning objective using prompts such as

① WHAT COULD IT MEAN?

② WHO USES THAT?

③ WHAT MIGHT I BE ABLE TO DO WITH IT?

④ HOW COULD WE BEST LEARN THAT?

In our over-tested education system, with increased levels of "delivery" teaching, learners can prepare for assessment (such as tests) by actively examining the experience – simulated and small-scale to begin – and thus learning about test anxiety, how to reduce it, etc, as well as actively reviewing their test performances in a less defensive manner.

Collaborative

Peer assessment can form an important bridge between private and public evaluation, and generate an amount and type of discussion which a teacher could not practically achieve with all members of the average size class. The levels of trust which can be built up between helpful peers can lead to the difficult processes of "feedback" becoming very powerful – as long as the helpfulness and effectiveness of peer conversations are reviewed to ensure that learners are handling them well. Such dialogue is exactly the same as is needed for high-level learning.

"when my partner tells me how to do something in a better way, I know they are not being mean, they are just trying to help me"

"In Talk Partners your partner can help you because they tell you different ways to work things out"

(comments from Year 1 pupils when reviewing their practice)

Students report that self-assessment and peer assessment make them think more, and learn more (Stefani, 1994).

Learner-driven

Even young children (Year 2) are able to participate in developing rubrics for their learning and also in applying criteria to the assessment of that learning. The quality of these rises over time (Higgins et al, 1994).

When learners together specify the quality criteria for the product they are engaged in, they use a wider range of personal criteria, yet incorporate those that would be given them as "success criteria". Thus they make the success their own.

year 4 classroom for a written task:

> "What is quality?"
> Neat – easy to read
> Proud of work
> Takes time
> Lot of self in work
> Thought it through
> Spelled right
> Used your skills
> Very interesting
> Good ideas
> Good thinking

year 8 - a collaborative concept map:

> "What is quality?
> Focus question
> All ideas included
> Colour-coded
> Categories and groups
> Describes connections
> Legible and neat
> Correct spelling

This can also extend to learners choosing the process for learning, In later years of school, learners are able to plan and organise extended periods of learning, including that which is a preparation for mandated tests (Starnes & Paris, 2000)

Learning about learning – and oneself as a learner

Self assessment most often means assessing one's performance, but it could really be assessment of oneself, especially as a learner, In one example, 12 year-old students devised four "levels of excellence" on which they regularly rated themselves in a number of their current areas of activity. Some examples of how they talk about themselves in this process suggest that it engages a powerful sense of themselves as advancing: – "I have risen up from … to …" "You evaluate how you have grown" etc.

	Teaching/ learning role
Novice	Needs help or direction
Apprentice	Learns with some assistance
Practitioner	Functions independently
Scholar	Facilitates learning

Importantly, learners can regard themselves as a novice in one area and a scholar in another.

Higgins KM, Harris NA & Kuehn LL (1994) "Placing assessment into the hands of young children: a study of student-generated criteria and self-assessment" *Educational Assessment* 2(4) 309-324

Starnes BA & Paris C (2000) "Choosing to learn" *Phi Delta Kappan*, (January) 392-397

Stefani LAJ (1994) "Peer, self and tutor assessment: relative reliabilities" *Studies in Higher Education.,* 19 (1) 69-75.

Watkins C (2003) *Learning: a sense-maker's guide*, London, Association of Teachers and Lecturers.
http://chriswatkins.net/download/84/

Watkins C, Carnell E and Lodge C. (2007) *Effective Learning in Classrooms*, London, Sage.
http://chriswatkins.net/download/82/