

Formative assessment and issues of equity: strategies, interactions and social consequences
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The presentation for the IAEA conference will focus on work in progress in relation to the contribution of formative assessment practices to the differential learning achievements of boys and girls.

Formative assessment is defined as the 'frequent, interactive assessment of student progress and understanding to identify learning needs' (CERI, 2005, p.21) and that 'innovations which include strengthening the practice of formative assessment produce significant, and often, substantial learning gains' (Black and William, 1998 p.2). In the presentation I will consider issues in relation to how the promotion and implementation of large-scale formative assessment policy reform has to date failed to consider the impact of such practices on boys' and girls' attainments. Data will be presented in relation to the context of the Northern Ireland (NI) Revised Curriculum at Key Stage 3 (KS3). From September 2007 all teachers in NI post-primary schools are being encouraged to use AfL strategies to assess key skills within the revised curriculum (CCEA, 2007). Examples of AfL strategies are: developing questioning technique; sharing learning and success criteria; student self- and peer assessment and providing quality feedback (comments) instead of marks or grades. The potential impact of these strategies to affect the learning achievements of boys and those of girls will be discussed.

Recently there has been the dissemination of research that advocates the use of formative assessment to specifically raise overall levels of student achievement as well as create better equity of student outcomes (CERI, 2005, William et al 2004). The out-workings of this research into programmes of formative assessment, especially through the principles of 'Assessment for Learning' (AfL) (ARG, 2002) have captured the interest of policy makers and practitioners alike. So much so that many educational systems world-wide encourage the use of such practices for *all* teachers across *all* phases of education as a way to raise standards and overall student achievement. However, we have yet to establish how such practices impact on, and contribute to, differences in performance between diverse groups of students. The presentation will reflect on these concerns.

Refs:

Assessment Reform Group (ARG) (2002) *Assessment for Learning: 10 Principles*, London: Institute of Education.

Black P and William D (1998) *Inside the Black Box*, London: Kings College London.

Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI) (2005) *Formative Assessment: improving learning in secondary classrooms*, Paris: OECD.

Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) (2007) *Assessment for Learning at Key Stage 3*, Belfast: CCEA.