

The Highland Council Education, Culture and Sport Service

Learning, Teaching and Assessment Policy

Introduction

This first revision of the Highland Learning and Teaching Policy reflects changes in educational thinking since the launch of our original version in 2003. It now includes assessment and has been written for Education, Culture and Sport staff, parents, pupils and others involved in lifelong learning.

The revised Policy is complemented by a (refreshed) Learning, Teaching and Assessment Toolkit and also the Highland CPD Reflection Framework which informed the Future Learning and Teaching project undertaken in various Highland learning communities during 2005-8. These are available as an integrated package on the Highland Virtual Learning Community www.hvlc.org.uk

Experience shows that this package is best used collectively. School and establishment managers have a crucial role to play in this process. In relation to continuous professional development, teachers and other staff are learners. Managers and other leaders of learning, then, should apply the principles and foster the characteristics of the Highland Learning, Teaching and Assessment Policy when organising and facilitating the learning experiences of staff. Cooperative and active learning opportunities will lie at the heart of these experiences.

Managers/ Leaders of learning should:

- Provide a strategic stimulus through LTA Policy development
- Encourage informal dialogue and peer observation amongst staff to engage with principles and improve practice
- Facilitate and resource various groups (learning communities) within the establishment and with staff from other establishments
- Organise and resource systematic 'in-house' observation and action research in order to improve individual practice and refresh collective policy
- Advertise and facilitate attendance at appropriate external CPD events followed by debriefing and identification of next steps.

Our LTA Policy endorses wholeheartedly for pupils and staff the educational purposes described in *Curriculum for Excellence*. We aim to develop ourselves and those we teach as: Successful Learners, Confident Individuals, Responsible Citizens and Effective Contributors. Our success in this aim will depend on how far all involved feel secure and valued, and the extent to which we all learn how to think effectively in different contexts.

Getting it right for every learner

No learner can be fully effective if he or she feels unhappy or troubled or insecure. It is the responsibility of the school community – school staff, pupils, parents and carers, professionals from partner agencies and others in the local community – to work together to ensure that each learner feels safe, healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected, responsible and included. Young people think that the teacher has a central role in this process, working with others in the school community to create the right conditions for effective learning.

Over the last sixty years, young people's ideas about what makes a successful teacher have been surprisingly consistent. These focus on personal qualities – how the teacher (*i.e. any person who provides a learning experience including auxiliary staff and youth workers*) acts as a role model – building relationships with individuals and the class as a whole, fostering relationships amongst learners.

According to young people, successful teachers are:

- Aspirational - genuinely believe that all learners can succeed
- Assertive - decisive and confident, firm but fair
- Encouraging - positive, supportive, welcoming genuine error as an opportunity to learn
- Enthusiastic - believe in what they are teaching and enjoy the job
- Humorous - show humour naturally and put learners at ease
- Open - prepared to challenge their own thinking and admit they may be wrong
- Respectful - genuinely like young people, care about them, listen to them, enjoy their company and do not disrespect them individually or collectively.

Before we engage with the key principles and characteristics of our policy, we should consider fully the crucial importance of establishing and maintaining good working relationships if successful learning is to take place.

Key principles

What are the key principles which inform learning and teaching in our schools, learning centres and beyond in the community? Our starting point is inclusion. Learners should not be subject to discrimination, intentional or otherwise, on the grounds of their social circumstances, gender, race, religion, cultural beliefs, disability or sexual orientation. *N.B. In the statements which follow, 'teachers' comprise all staff undertaking a teaching role.*

Our key principles for all learners are:

Engagement

Learners need motivation. They should have a significant reason for engaging in the learning process and positive feelings about involvement.

Learners – especially the young – are often self-motivating; they are desperate to find out, know, understand – it's as natural as breathing. Learning brings its own emotional and/or intellectual reward. Equally often, though, learners require an external incentive to provide motivation – an award, a certificate, a prize, praise, promotion. To be effective, such incentives must be meaningful to the learner.

As teachers – often through personal example – we should foster a love of learning by nurturing self motivation. But we should also motivate – inspire, challenge and praise. We should show that we value all learners, creating an ethos of achievement and organising tasks which will bring rewards that matter from the learner's point of view.

Participation

Learners need to participate in the learning process. They should be active and take as much responsibility as possible for their own learning.

Learners should lead whenever possible. They should make informed choices about what, where and how they learn; they should self and peer assess. Learners should be aware of themselves as learners, conscious of their own preferred styles of learning, confident enough to seek help, perceptive enough to know where help may be best sought, skilful enough to access help readily.

As teachers, we are lifelong learners – a state of mind which should inform our professional practice, development and our own wider learning. Through collegiality, we should create learning communities in our classrooms, establishments and beyond.

Dialogue

Learners need to communicate through verbal and/or multi-sensory dialogue. Research and empirical evidence demonstrate that real understanding takes place when learners work through with someone else what is to be learned and how far they have been successful in their learning.

Learners, where possible, should talk through their learning regularly with their teachers, their peers, parents and others. They should question, answer, expound, challenge assertions, support propositions, offer alternatives, suggest solutions, peer assess ...

As teachers – through personal example and setting standards in our questioning and provision of feedback – we should create the conditions in which communication and dialogue can thrive, where self confidence and respect for others underpin all interaction, where achievement is celebrated and error welcomed as a stepping stone to success.

Thinking

Learners need to think. This thinking should be critical and creative, robust and flexible in order that all may understand and achieve their potential whatever the context.

Learners should be positively critical: questioning, investigating, testing, seeking after the truth about themselves, others and the world in which they live. They should be creative: imagining, expressing, exploring the boundaries of the possible so that there are no limits to ambition.

As teachers we should be thinkers: reflective professionals – self aware, systematically evaluative, focused on our own improvement and that of those in our care. We should use the language of thinkers, ask the questions that matter, enable and empower other learners to ask those questions, so that they and those who respond may make their thinking explicit. Crucially, despite the pressures, we ourselves should take time to think.

Assessment is for Learning

Effective assessment informs and supports the learning and teaching process, helping to raise attainment and achievement. All involved should understand and take appropriate account of the three main types of assessment:

Assessment *for* learning is essentially formative. It is the process of seeking and interpreting evidence so that learners, parents/carers and teachers can decide, through high quality dialogue, where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go next and how best to get there.

Assessment *as* learning is essentially evaluative. It is about using assessment to learn how to learn and thus encourage the development of autonomous learners. In effective assessment *as* learning, learners through self and peer assessment identify and reflect about their own evidence of learning. Personal learning planning provides a supportive framework for these processes.

Assessment *of* learning is essentially summative. It is about measuring, analysing and reporting performance. Effective assessment *of* learning provides information about individual skills and knowledge leading to awards which are passports to opportunities in life, work and education.

For further information about what a school does in order to make its assessment system effective, see the Appendix (c. Assessment is for Learning).

Key characteristics

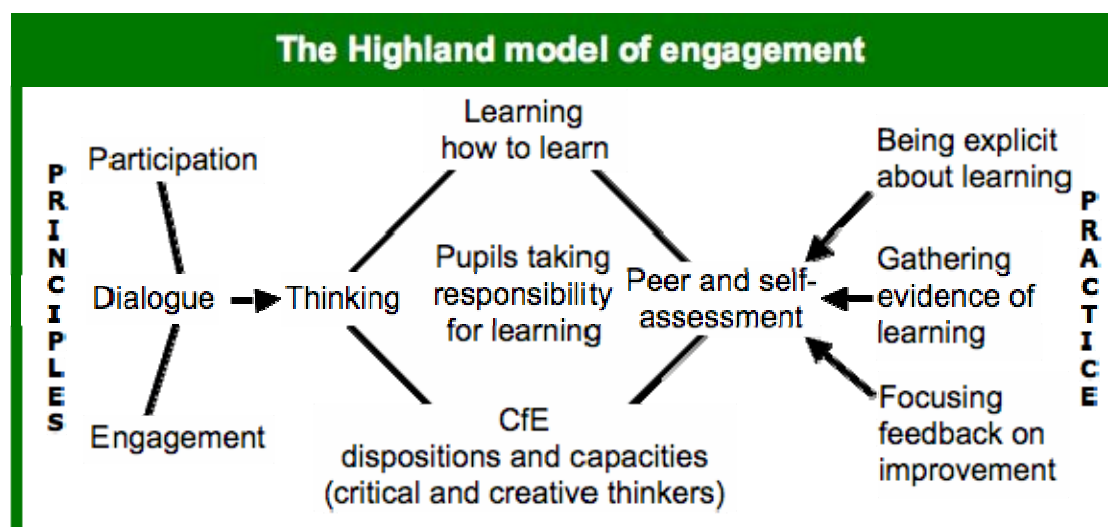
An excellent learning experience, one informed by the relationships, principles and assessment practices described in this Policy, will include most of the following most of the time:

- People welcoming other people, enjoying each others' company and having fun through challenge and hard work
- Learners reviewing prior work, making choices and agreeing what needs to be done, how it is to be done, where and when it is to be done using appropriate resources including ICT
- Learners leading - asking each other meaningful questions which require thought, engaging in dialogue as a class and in groups, modelling processes and demonstrating knowledge and skills to each other and other audiences
- Learners understanding and sharing standards, self and peer assessing, receiving meaningful feedback about what has been achieved and agreeing next steps to improve.

We can find more detailed descriptions of very good practice in *The Journey to Excellence* Parts 2 and 3, in *The Child at the Centre, How Good is our Community Learning and Development?* and in the seven principles of *Curriculum for Excellence's Building the Curriculum 3*.

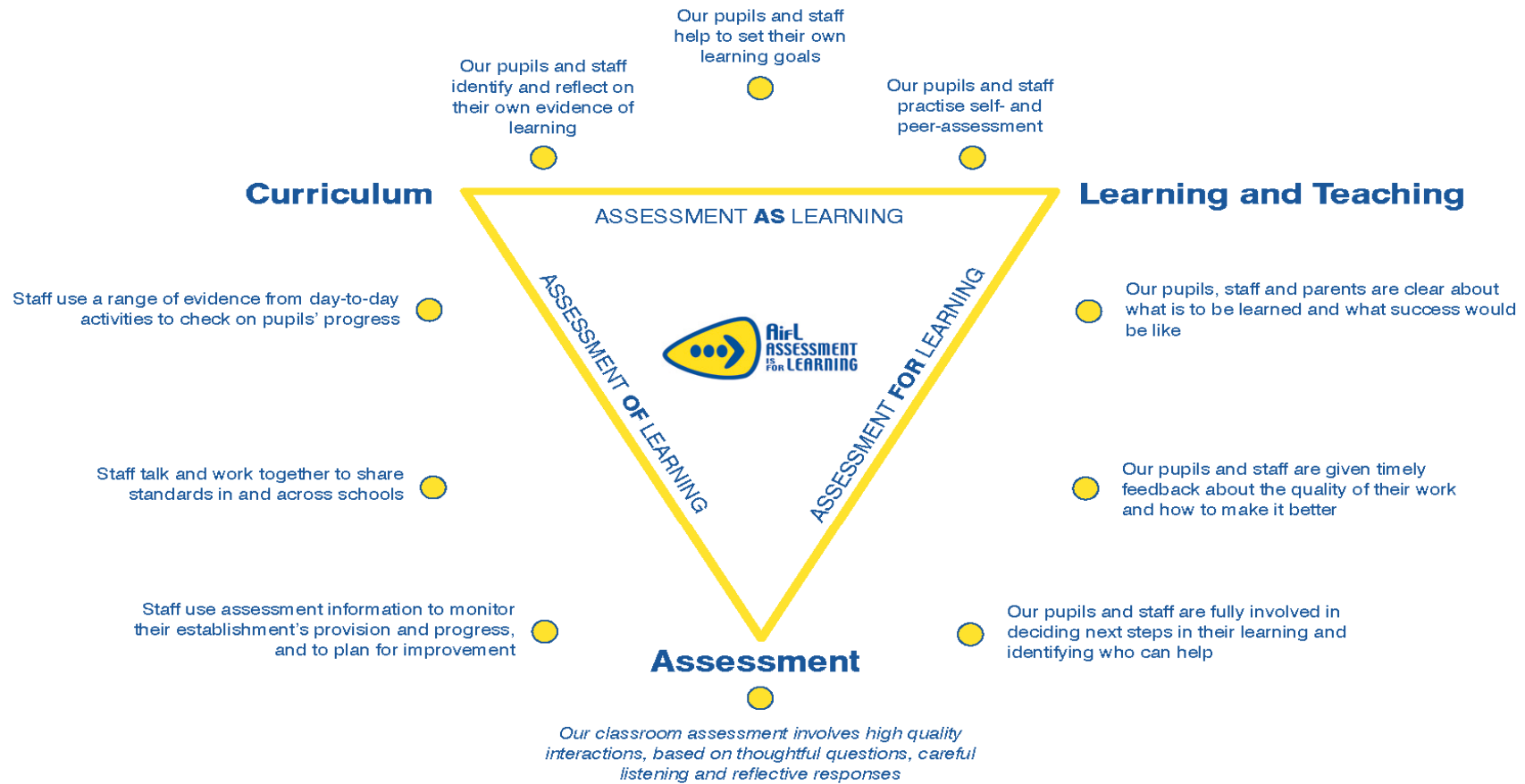
The Highland Model of Engagement

The Highland model of engagement was developed as a fundamental element of the Future Learning and Teaching Project in Highland 2005-8. It illustrates the relationship between the principles and practice described in this policy and how these impact on learners, supporting them to take greater responsibility for their own learning.



APPENDIX

What is an AifL School? A Place Where Everyone is Learning Together



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