

## Appendix B

### Assessment for Learning

Bethan Marshall at the LATE Conference in November

---

by Keith Davidson

---

This was a return trip by Bethan to a LATE Conference on Assessment, but not a repeat performance. Two years before she had stood in for Paul Black of the Kings College 'black box' team, concentrating on the research evidence on formative assessment that is the basis of the team's work with schools in Oxford and Medway in Maths, Science and English; now she described her own work in English for the programme.

She preferred 'formative assessment' to the more compromised 'assessment for learning', if only to underline the contrast with the testable 'knowledge' and memorised methods of the 'summative assessments' in the present testing regime, inhibiting learning particularly in English. English teaching should have no truck with that.

But while one conference group turned its attention to the campaign co-ordinated by John Wilks against the KS3 tests in just those terms, the other group considering alternative 'Portfolio' (aka 'coursework') assessments was necessarily still looking at set-piece submissions for summative assessment. That's about final achievement; Bethan's focus is on work in progress (which is surely what 'course work' ought to be?). How to reconcile the two?

The official shift of the knowledge base in English – what it now means to 'know' in the English curriculum - relies on notions of reportable progression in an obsession with coverage, foregrounding knowledge of techniques and generic conventions, at the expense of content, meaning and purpose and the reader/writer relationship - all for summative assessment as retrospective record keeping, leading nowhere.

Assessment for learning is predictive, 'formative' if leading to action. It relies on richness of task and questioning, quality of feedback as dialogue, and sharing of criteria in self and peer assessment. It casts learners as critical reader/writers, interrogating texts, their own and those of others, and engages them in a collective construction of knowledge. In place of atomising features and techniques it offers entry into imaginary space and a chance to listen to what is being said. They will learn if only we can let them hear: why don't we read to them more after all?

For an update on the development of the Kings programme see Paul Black, Christine Harrison, Clare Lee, Bethan Marshall and Dylan Wiliam, 2003: *Assessment for Learning: Putting it into practice* (Open University Press). For Bethan's account of her work on assessment in English you'll have to wait for her contribution to the NATE 'Perspectives on English' series.

It's work in progress.

['That's my "short sentence", Miss!']