



ASSESS (Active Seminar Series for Early-Career, Student and in-Service Teachers): Introducing a Shared Programme of Support for ‘Assessment as Learning’ Post-Pandemic for Post-Primary Student and In-Career Teachers: From Case Study to Praxis

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1. Executive summary A

Background/context

The focus of teaching is helping people to learn. For this reason, theories of learning and assessment are core components of initial and continuing teacher education. It is possible to categorise three main theories of learning as follows:

1. Behaviourist theory - rote learning and memorisation of facts and information are the central tools of learning here. Assessment tends to be narrowly focused on evaluating knowledge acquisition. Feedback to students is generally corrective (Baird, 2014)
2. Constructivist theory – the development of mental schemata through connecting previous learning to new learning is the model here. Assessment is generally built around problem-solving and reflective tasks. Feedback to students is designed to improve competence in strategic thinking (James, 2006).
3. Sociocultural theory – learning how to use available cultural tools to become competent in valued social and cultural practices. Assessment is woven into the learning process to enhance students’ participation in and contribution to valued social practices (Gipps, 1998). Feedback is distributed among all participants in the learning process and is holistic in nature.

It is clear from these theories that the establishment of a focus and purpose for learning is essential to the achievement of learning outcomes. Assessment and feedback are part of the process of evaluating and supporting learning. If assessment tasks are used to evaluate how well something has been learned, this is described as *assessment of learning* (Stiggins, 2005). However, if assessment is woven into the process of teaching and learning, and used to inform and support future learning, it is described as *assessment for learning* (ARG, 2002).

Learning to learn is an increasingly important focus for students in post-primary education (James, 2023). This is where the concept of *assessment as learning* has an important role to play in the learning process. *Assessment as learning* takes a slightly different focus within the broader definition of *assessment for learning* in that it highlights the role of the student as an assessor and the consequent development of key skills such as self-regulation, metacognition and motivation in learning (Earl, 2013; Dann, 2014). Thus, learning how to learn is served when *assessment as learning* is part of routine classroom assessment practice.

This report describes the collaborative project established between three colleagues working in initial and career-long post-primary teacher education in Ireland, North and South. We set out to explore how the concept of *assessment as learning* (AaL) appears in initial and continuing teacher

education in Ireland, North and South. We also aimed to examine opportunities to expand or diversify provision in teacher education in this area through the initial exploration of an online module to support student and in-career teachers to develop their assessment as learning classroom practice.

The benefits of assessment for learning and assessment as learning are well documented. It provides for the sharing of responsibility for learning between teachers and students (Black and Wiliam, 2009) and activates students as teaching and learning resources for one another (ARG, 2002). It improves the overall quality of learning and teaching in the classroom (Black and Wiliam, 2009) and perhaps most significantly of all, it improves students' capacities for autonomy, self-assessment and self-regulation in learning (Black and Wiliam, 2009). At its core is the notion of 'support' and 'scaffolded learning', an ally to the contemporary, differentiated classroom. However, the processes and practices of assessment *for* and *as* learning can be both difficult to define and execute in the reality of classroom practice (Schellekens, 2021; Bennett, 2011). Furthermore, although assessment is the jewel in the crown of the modern practitioner it is often underused (Gao et al., 2020; Stiggins, 2002), poorly practiced (Race, 2019 and Brown, 2005) or misrepresented (Dunn and Mulvenon, 2019) in teaching communities. The conflict is one of interest to teacher-education researchers and is a growing challenge, particularly post-Covid, to the modern classroom and the contemporary practitioner (Ellis and Smith, 2017; Entwistle and Ramsden, 2015; McDowell, 1995). Post-primary teacher education programmes, both undergraduate and postgraduate, pre-service and in-service, incorporate modules focusing on assessment pedagogy and the theory and practice of assessment in education. However, there is a lack of research on student and in-career teachers' experiences and enactment of best practice in the specific area of assessment as learning. This project aimed to explore this element of assessment practice and provide the basis for the initial design of a cross-border online module for teachers across the continuum of teacher education about assessment as learning the concept, and associated pedagogical implications for teaching, learning and assessment.

Research aims and objectives

This project aims to explore post-primary student-teachers' and in-service teachers' understanding and experiences of AaL, with a view to designing a cross-border online module for student-teachers in ITE and in-service teachers' professional development, to enhance their theoretical and practical knowledge of AaL.

To achieve this aim, the four main research objectives were:

1. To explore current understandings of the concept of AAL among post-primary student and in-career teachers enrolled in initial teacher education and master in education programmes in UCC and SUC.
2. To identify opportunities to develop student and in-career teachers' understanding of the concept of AaL and to identify the range of learning outcomes required to scaffold teachers' practice as they implement AaL practices in the classroom.
3. To organise a conference for academic staff, school partners and initial/in-career teacher education students with a keynote from a significant researcher in this area to develop understanding of the concept and stimulate debate and innovative practice in relation to assessment as learning.
4. To research the feasibility of designing a cross-border, synchronous and asynchronous online module to support student teachers and in-career teachers North and South in exploring, understanding and implementing best practice in assessment as learning approaches and processes.

Teacher education students, both undergraduate and postgraduate, in University College Cork (UCC) and in Stranmillis University College (SUC), participated in this project. It is envisioned that the data collected in this study will eventually inform the future design and implementation of a cross-border online module to support post-primary teachers across the continuum of teacher education in this area of practice.

Methods/data sources

Phase 1 of the project involved the distribution of an online qualitative questionnaire to all registered students on the post-primary BEDSSPE and PME programmes in UCC and post-primary Master of Education and Master of Teaching students and B.Ed Post-Primary students in SUC. The design of the questionnaire was focused on the '*what?, how? and why?*' of teachers' practice in this area. The "*what?*" questions were informed by a social constructivist understanding of teaching, learning and assessment (Shepard, 2000). The "*how?*" and "*why?*" questions were based on the ecological model of teacher agency (Biesta et. al., 2015). Informed by the intersection of these *What? How? Why?* prompts, the survey was designed to explore the following questions:

2. What are the opportunities and challenges in developing early career, in-career and student teacher assessment knowledge and values to support their enactment of best assessment as learning (AaL) practice in post-primary schools North and South?
3. What would a model of good practice regarding AaL look like?

4. How will this model inform initial and continuing post-primary teacher education North and South?

Phase 2 of the project involved the organisation of an online conference with a keynote address from a speaker with expertise in assessment as learning. This conference was designed to provide in-career and student teachers, mentor teachers, school leaders and initial teacher educators with an understanding of the mindset and the narrative of contemporary practitioners and researchers in this area. This provided an observatory opportunity as well as eliciting views on fundamental course design ideas.

Key findings

A core value around the ambition to implement creative and effective assessment practices was often in conflict with the pressure of accountability and the lack of time, confidence and opportunity in the classroom to develop these practices in a meaningful way. Supporting student and in-career teachers' agency and collaboration skills as well as their responsive approach to pupil learning has emerged as a key priority in developing teacher practice in the area of assessment generally and AAL in particular.

2. Introduction

Definitions of assessment vary but Schellekens et al. (2021) summarise the different approaches to assessment in the following way:

“AaL represents the active engagement of students in assessment and their learning, AfL represents the identification of learning throughout assessment, and AoL represents the measurement of learning by using assessments (Schellekens et al, 2021, p.2).

Assessment as learning is most closely aligned to constructivist and sociocultural theories of learning. It is sharply focused on the active role and participation of students in learning and assessment tasks and activities. It amplifies the importance of feedback (teacher, self and peer) to activate and enhance pupil learning and the key skill of learning how to learn (Shepard, 2000; Swaffield, 2011; Dann, 2014; Winstone et al, 2017, James, 2023). The process of assessment as learning encompasses concepts such as self-regulation, self-efficacy, metacognition and feedback in the learning and assessment processes in classroom teaching and learning. This flexible, student-centred approach to assessment will have resonance post-pandemic following the disruption to existing and traditional modes of assessment. Supporting teachers' practice in this area should

enhance experiences and outcomes for their assessment practices and for broad and holistic post-primary school pupils' learning.

AaL is viewed as integral to the learning experience and planned around socio-constructivist methodologies. It affords itself to the notion of scaffolding learning through the exploratory process of assessment that is negotiated in dynamic classroom teaching and learning. Many researchers have documented ideas about 'what works' in assessment practices, but little has been developed by way of a best practice approach to active guided learning with feedback, whereby assessment is at the heart of the planned learning process (Hattie and Timperley, 2007). The concept of AaL in this project is based on the understanding that learning can occur when the opportunity for active participation in assessment is provided and congruent with a pupil's motivational and metacognitive capacities (Winstone et al., 2016).

Assessment as learning is part of the process of formative assessment and is a core component of the practice of teaching and the process of learning. The focus of formative assessment is to elicit evidence of learning during the learning process to enable learners and their teachers to use this information to support future learning (Black and Wiliam, 2018; Assessment Reform Group, 2002). Activities that denote assessment for the purpose of learning include the clarification and sharing of learning outcomes and success criteria, interactive classroom dialogue and questioning, formative feedback, self and peer assessment (Black and Wiliam, 2009). Each of these strategies envisions the learner as an active and agentic participant in the learning process. Assessment as learning is a concept that captures the specific role that students play when they engage with assessment as part of the process of learning (Dann, 2014). It also provides students with the knowledge and skills to engage as assessors, in an active and agentic way, with the process of learning in different subject areas.

Feedback is the skill that equips the modern, relational teacher as they endeavour to develop their student centric, progressive and developmental (and transformative) practices (Panadero and Lipnevich, 2022; Brooks et al, 2021). Research communities have struggled to resolve the conundrum as to why it is so underused or poorly used (Van der Kleij, 2022). The challenge is one of teachers 'helping' learning to happen (on the one hand) while also challenging narrowly prescribed 'learning outcomes' (Hamilton and Hattie, 2022). The value and impact of teacher feedback as part of the learning process has come to the fore during the Covid schooling difficulties of recent years. Yet, the misunderstanding of feedback as a process and skills remains (Esterhazy, 2019) despite its evidence-based influence on the learners and the learning. Perhaps assessment 'as'

learning with the fundamental function of a feedback pedagogy, may provide teachers with an understanding of assessment that serves both learning and learning to learn in a meaningful and effective way (James, 2023).

3. Research aim and objectives

The overall aim of this project was to explore current values, understanding and learning needs of student and in-career teachers North and South in assessment. This input was then used as a source of enquiry to underpin and inform the initial design and learning outcomes of a cross-border module and will consolidate the inquiry and evidence-based approach to teaching, learning and assessment at the heart of this project.

The main research questions underpinning this research are:

1. What are the opportunities and challenges in developing student and in-career teacher assessment knowledge and values and supporting their enactment of best assessment as learning (AaL) practice in post-primary schools North and South?
2. What would a model of good practice regarding AaL look like?
3. How will this model inform the learning outcomes for the teaching of assessment as learning concepts and methods in an online teacher education course for post-primary teachers in Ireland, North and South?

4. Collaborative interactions

The partnerships between UCC and SUC was very much aligned to the overall SCOTENS mission to facilitate teacher educators – North and South– in exploring education issues of common interest and establishing a sustainable education partnership on the island of Ireland. The initial scoping out of project ideas centered around the support required for student and in-career teachers in developing practice in assessment as learning. The research team decided to examine how post-primary teachers enrolled in initial and continuing teacher education programmes, in the North and South of Ireland, conceptualised assessment as learning and how they enacted this concept in their classroom practice.

The AaL online conference was the final capstone event in this project. The decision to host the conference online on the MS Teams platform provided a valuable opportunity for a wide range of attendees to participate. These included student teachers, mentor teachers, initial teacher educators, school leaders and principals from Ireland North and South.

It is envisioned that this collaboration will continue in working towards the scoping out and design of a cross-border online module to explore the concept of assessment as learning and provide post-primary student and in-career teachers with an opportunity to engage in cross-border knowledge sharing and collaboration in their professional practice in this area.

5. Key Concepts in this study

Assessment as Learning

Assessment as Learning (AaL) is still an evolving concept (Dann, 2019). It is often aligned with the broader assessment for learning purpose and certainly shares common characteristics with this mode of assessment (Schellekens et al., 2021). One of the key features of assessment for learning is that it shifts the focus from teacher centred to student centred learning and assessment and it is very much associated with responsive and relational teaching (Wilkerson, 2020; Hattie and Clarke, 2019). The most well-established definition of assessment for learning focuses on the idea of agency in the assessment process:

“Assessment for Learning is part of everyday practice by students, teachers and peers that seeks, reflects upon and responds to information from dialogue, demonstration and observation in ways that enhance ongoing learning” (Klenowski, 2009, 264).

Assessment *as* learning takes a slightly different focus within this broader definition of assessment *for* learning in that it highlights the role of the student as an assessor in the process (Earl, 2013). However, AaL can also be defined as a standalone concept. Dann (2019) argues that a focus on the role of the student in assessment is central to an understanding of the concept of AaL. It is linked to students' learning in the role of the student as assessor and the consequent development of student knowledge of how to learn, how to engage in self-regulation of learning and how to engage in implementing change in response to feedback from others (including teachers and peers). While assessment for learning is a very well-established idea, there is a difference between enacting the “letter” and the “spirit” of assessment for learning in classroom practice (Marshall and Drummond, 2006). Some researchers even argue that assessment and ‘feedback’ (the side of AaL that links the teacher and the learner pedagogically and epistemologically) should be completely separated to better support student learning (Esterhazy, 2019; Winstone & Carless, 2019; Winstone et al., 2020). It could thus be concluded that the authenticity of feedback and the epistemology of student participation in assessment pedagogy to support learning is the key variable in the enactment of assessment as learning as an authentic and purposeful dimension of assessment in the classroom.

This project understands assessment as learning to refer to the active role of students as assessors of their own and their peers' learning and the consequent development of the key skills of self-regulation and metacognition (Earl, 2013). The focus of the project is on the opportunities and challenges that exist for student and in-career teachers in facilitating this agentic student participation in assessment and identifying the pedagogical values and principles that facilitate this approach to assessment.

Swaffield (2011) makes an interesting and important distinction between 'authentic' assessment that focuses on the process of learning in the classroom and the application of a range of strategies that may not give enough agency or value to enable meaningful participation in the assessment (and thus learning) process (Swaffield, 2011). She identifies three key components that are necessary to ensure authentic assessment for learning. These are:

- the ability of students to understand and conceptualise "quality" (and how to achieve this) in relation to their learning and expertise in the subject.
- the development of student autonomy in their learning (through feedback and relational teaching).
- An explicit focus on the process of learning thus developing pupil capacity in learning how to learn (Swaffield and Rawi, 2023, James 2023).

On the one hand, there are challenges for all teachers in enacting these practices in a meaningful way (Brooks et al., 2021), and this is true of student teachers as well as experienced teachers. On the other hand, this is an essential ingredient when 'closing the learning gap' for improved achievement and student learning (Bajaj et al., 2018). The idea of assessment as something that is done 'with' as opposed 'to' students (Gipps, 1998) is a different perspective on the role of the teacher and student in assessment. In a similar way, the etymological root of the word "assessment" in the Latin word "assidere," meaning "to sit beside," is used by Swaffield (2011) and reaffirmed by Swaffield and Rawi (2023). This envisions the teacher as accompanying the student on their learning through assessment and has implications for the teacher's values, priorities, and assessment pedagogy. In fact, assessment pedagogy is at the heart of this project as it aims to empower and challenge student and in-career teachers to move beyond the 'toolkit and strategy' approach to assessment and explore the potential of assessment in the process of post-primary student learning.

The Concept of Agency in Teacher Education

The repeated message around assessment as a changing epistemology (Moskowitz et al., 2022) highlights the need to alter our mindsets in the field of education. Assessment as a pedagogy for relational teaching with feedback is clearly the way to manage the vast and evolving profile of

learners in the contemporary classroom (Winstone and Boud, 2022). This leads to a reconsideration of agency and while not a new mindset, this certainly suggests an emerging shift in agency power. The understanding of teacher agency in this study is influenced by the work of Priestley, Biesta and Robinson (2015). Their ecological model of teacher agency differs from traditional sociological concepts of agency in that it focuses on the emergent process of agency as it develops through the ecological environment where it is enacted (Biesta et al, 2015; Priestley et al., 2015). In other words, agency emerges in the interaction between the individual and their environment. The person has an active role in using the available resources in their environment to assert their own creativity, values, and beliefs which in turn underpin and shape their actions. This model also views teacher agency as having three temporal dimensions. These are past experiences, future possibilities and current possibilities and constraints (Priestly et al., 2015). This expands the range of influences on teachers' enactment of their experiences, principles and values as they develop in and through classroom pedagogy.

In their exploration of teacher agency in teacher education, Soini et. al. (2015) argue that professional agency in teacher education:

“consists of the interrelated elements of a teacher’s motivation to continuously learn about teaching, their efficacy beliefs about their learning as teachers, and intentional activities for facilitating and managing learning in everyday pedagogical practices” in the various professional contexts of their work” (Soini et. al, 2015).

This highlights the importance of providing teachers in initial and continuing education with choices about areas of interest they would like to pursue as active agents in their own learning. It also indicates the significance of developing teachers' core beliefs and values about participating in learning communities with peers and others throughout their professional careers. The intentional use of peers, pupils and others as a resources and support for professional learning enhances teacher agency. These “collaborative learning resources” (Soini et.al., 2015, p. 644) include pupil teacher interactions as these are rich resources to challenge, extend and use different dimensions of the teacher professional identity (Soini et. al., 2015, p. 643).

Teacher education is a dynamic and formative phase in the professional life of the teacher. Giving students (pre- and in-service) opportunities to collaborate with others, make choices about their own learning and reflect on their learning experiences is crucial to the development of teacher agency (Soini et. al. 2015, p. 651).

Priestley et al (2015) identify three key elements in the achievement of teacher agency:

1. Iterational: informed by past experiences, both personal and professional

2. Projective: orientated towards the future achievement of long- and short-term goals
3. Practical-evaluative: constrained and supported by available cultural, structural and material resources. (Priestley et. al., 2015, p. 4).

In this project we are most concerned with the practical-evaluative dimension of agency. We use the concept to explore the opportunities and challenges experienced by teachers as they engage with assessment as learning in their classrooms. The cultural, structural and material components of teacher agency in using, exploring and reflecting on assessment as learning practices and processes are considered and some implications for initial and continuing teacher education in this area are suggested.

6. Assessment in Policy and Practice in teacher education in Ireland, North and South

Post-Primary Initial Teacher Education in the Republic of Ireland

Initial post-primary teacher education in Ireland is based on three core areas of study (Teaching Council, 2009). These are:

- (a) Studies in the foundation discipline of education - these encompass educational sciences including curriculum and assessment.
- (b) Professional Studies – these are based on study in the professional pedagogy of the student teacher’s specialist subject. One of the core components of study in this area is the demonstration of understanding and application in practice of evaluation and assessment knowledge gained through the foundation studies in this area.
- (c) The final area of study is direct teaching of a class in a second level school. Assessment will obviously be a central part of the student teacher’s practice while on placement under the supervision of a university tutor and working with a mentor teacher (Treoraí) at school. (Teaching Council, 2009)

These core areas are woven into initial post primary teacher education (ITE) programmes and within these areas both formative and summative assessment is explored in theory and practice. Understanding contemporary curriculum development and policy requirements is at the heart of the foundational and professional elements of post primary initial teacher education. Studies in curriculum and assessment enable student teachers to engage critically with curriculum and assessment theories, concepts, policies, and practices. This work bridges theory and practice to enable student teachers to plan for effective school and classroom pedagogical practice. This critical understanding is fostered through a thorough engagement with the ideology of curriculum and

assessment policy both nationally and internationally. This deep foundational knowledge of curriculum and assessment also includes analysis of current developments and requirements in curriculum and assessment in Irish post-primary schools. This is to enable students to design appropriate post primary school assessments in line with these requirements. Designing and conducting classroom-based assessment and schoolwork components for certification including design and implementation of classroom-based assessment and SLARs (Subject Learning and Review meetings for school-based moderation of classroom-based assessment at junior cycle) and reporting as well as recent developments in senior cycle education reform are all woven into the professional studies modules in initial teacher education. The grounding in curriculum studies is explored further with a subject-specific disciplinary lens in pedagogy modules. The bridging of theory and classroom practice is achieved through direct teaching on school placement. Student teachers are challenged to reflect on and implement curriculum and assessment practice in line with national policies and school assessment schedules and routines.

Post Primary Teacher Education in Northern Ireland

Teacher Education in Northern Ireland is informed by two departments' work and associated policies: the Department of Education (NI) who have a statutory duty for schools (working with the Education Authority) and the Department for the Economy who fund Higher Education. As Higher Education providers, the Colleges of Teacher Education (Stranmillis University College and St Mary's University College) in Northern Ireland are regulated by the Quality Assurance Agency, as Colleges of Queen's University of Belfast. Both Colleges inform and follow the General Teaching Council of Northern Ireland standards, defined as teaching competences (GTCNI, 2018) similar to, while distinct from, other UK jurisdictions. The legacy and policy in teacher education and NI schools has been reflective of the UK more widely, recognising the troubled past of NI, the relationships with Ireland's shared border and educational systems and values, influencing the development of teacher education ecological approaches (Montgomery and Smith, 2006). Of post-Covid times, the challenge for teacher education is not merely one of addressing the needs of the skills-focused curriculum (the new NI curriculum launched in 2007), it is one of change and the need for reform (Purdy et al., 2021).

Various models of teacher education (O'Hagan, 2021; Mutton, 2015) exist in Northern Ireland. The degree-pathway (Bachelor of Education) is a specialist programme for teacher education across four years of study, while the post-graduate pathway (Postgraduate Certificate in Education) is for those with graduate backgrounds who wish to enter the teaching profession after one year of study. Early and continuing professional development is further managed by the Education Authority in

Northern Ireland including the induction process for new teachers, known as early career professionals. Higher Education Institutions including the Colleges in Northern Ireland (Stranmillis University College and St Mary's University college) offer professional master's level awards for career-long teacher education and professional learning accredited by Queen's University of Belfast.

Teacher Education and Assessment as Learning

'the process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners and their teachers to decide where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go next, and how best to get them there' (Assessment Reform Group, 2002:1).

The ongoing reform of assessment in Northern Ireland, following the calls for change post the introduction of the revised NI curriculum, has focused on both performance improvements in our schools in terms of addressing underachievement, and on the co-agency necessary in schools to better support both learner-centredness and the value-added nature of feedback as a relational teaching skill and assessment pedagogy.

Following guiding principles of the GTCNI code, teacher education programmes in Northern Ireland support the development to teacher's attributes, skills and knowledge as set out in the 27 competency-based descriptors, under three broad headings, viz: professional values and practice; professional knowledge and understanding; professional skills and application; planning and leading; teaching and learning; and assessment (GTCNI 2007). Teacher education is thus a journey. *'predicated upon the notion that the achievement of competence is a developmental process which, of necessity, transcends early teacher education and continues throughout a teacher's career....'* (GTCNI: page 11).

In-Service Teacher Education

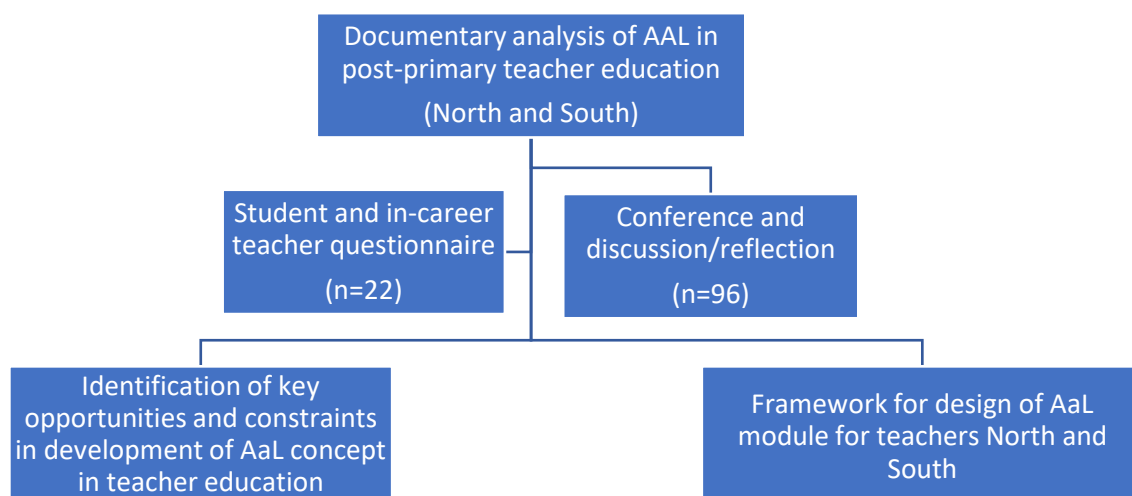
In-service teacher education is a vital part of Ireland and Northern Ireland's distinctiveness in terms of professional learning and teacher professional development. European teacher education researchers highlight the value of master's level progression (Masters, 2015; Kansanen, 2013) and the need for academic (research informed) teacher education at Higher Education level (O'Hagan, 2021; McMahon et al., 2015; McLean et al., 2015). Many countries with high levels of outcomes offer teacher education as a master's profession (Toom et al, 2010; Hattie 2009; Cochran-Smith and Zeichner 2005; Terhart, 2000) while other countries lacking in Masterliness (and thus research-informed practices) continue to be challenged by outcomes and underachievement rates.

Although master's degrees are a commended and popular route for many teachers, it remains an optional pathway in both jurisdictions for teacher professional learning. Cochrane-Smith (2005) highlighted the need for teacher education to become much more than an outcomes-based profession and urged teacher educators to challenge this indifference. Partnerships are important in all societies and communities of practice, valuing the worth of those who best know how to support teachers on their journey, while acknowledging the changes of modern schools and societies. A research informed, evidence-based, teaching community is one rich in resourceful learning (Flores, 2016) while suitably equipped to probe and challenge as change agents working in partnership with the wider education community (Snook, 2007; Terhart, 2000). Teacher education, as a journey thus, plays a key role in this process both in the preparation of teachers and their development thereafter (Kennedy, 2015).

7. Methodology

This was a two-phase study. Phase 1 was a qualitative questionnaire inviting student teachers in post-primary initial teacher education programmes in the south of Ireland and student teacher and in-career teachers enrolled in post-primary teacher education programmes from the north of Ireland, to reflect on their understanding of the concept of AaL and their experience of both learning about the concept in their ITE and continuing education programmes, and using it as part of their practice in their own classrooms. Ethical approval was granted from the Social Research Ethics Committee (SREC) in UCC to conduct this research.

The following figure outlines the overall design framework of the study.



The student teacher and in-service practitioner questionnaire was designed to elicit the teachers’ values, attitudes and experiences of learning about AaL in their ITE /Masters in Education courses and their use of AaL as a pedagogical and assessment tool in practice. This questionnaire was developed using Shepard’s social constructivist assessment framework (2000). This was the ‘what?’ of the study. It was designed to ascertain responses to questions about the use of assessment in the process of learning and the role of feedback and pupil participation in this process including AaL (e.g., Dann, 2014), self-regulated learning (e.g., Panadero et al., 2018) and models of feedback (e.g., Hattie and Timperley, 2007; Winstone et. al., 2017). The key concept we explored was student teacher/in-service teacher agency in developing praxis. This was the “how?” and “why?” of the study. For this we used Priestley et al.’s ecological approach to teacher agency (2015). The central concept underpinning the questionnaire in this project is agency, which we understand to mean the capacity for individuals to engage in social action mediated by the constraints and opportunities encountered (Priestley et al. 2014). We take the view that the drivers and inhibitors that interact with agency need to be defined and understood to provide teachers with the resources they need to develop their professional capacities and identities throughout the continuum of teacher education from student to late career.

8. Summary of Results

Of the 22 participants who completed the survey, 13 participants were engaged in undergraduate initial teacher education programmes, 6 in Postgraduate initial teacher education programmes and 3 were enrolled on an in- service masters level programme. The 22 participants were engaged across several subjects as illustrated in Table 1 below.

Subject	Number of Participants
Accounting, Economics and Business studies	1
Business	2
Creativity, technology, and assessment as part of the master’s in teaching.	1
English Music	1
French and Business	1
French, CSPS	1
Master of Teaching	2
Maths and Physical Education	1

Med Pastoral Care	1
PE, French	1
Physical Education, French	1
Post Primary RE	2
Leadership	1
RE and Business	1
Religion and English	3
Religious Education and Science	1
Religious studies and Computer Science	1

The main findings from the questionnaire are summarised here:

Q1. Describe your experience of planning and using assessment in your classroom as a teacher.

Six participants noted that their experience of planning and using assessment was mostly within the development of lessons and integration of this into everyday classroom practices,

"I plan for AfL and AoL."

Interestingly five participants noted that assessment was overly formalised and focused predominantly on written examinations, calling for more informal, formative assessment, to be implemented,

"I am an advocate of formative assessment."

"Assessment does not always need to be formal and on paper".

"I find formative assessment very helpful in informing areas of student difficulty, without the need for a class test."

Four participants felt that they had limited knowledge of how to implement assessment. One participant implied that they had no formal teacher training on assessment as they were at the beginning of their course, indicating that this area may not be covered in the early stages of teacher training,

"Being at the start of official teacher training this is very limited. We are only starting to write Lesson Plans now".

"Little knowledge of how to do it."

There were requests from one participant that more training is needed in this area to support teachers,

"Difficult to appropriately and effectively design assessments methods and it is an area that I feel I have received the least amount of training in."

Other uses of assessment practices included tracking and reporting on pupil performance, communicating with parents, providing a window into students learning, to grade students, to plan as a department,

"Assessment is also important as it gives me a window into the students' learning."

"Tracking progress looking and scores and baselines and communicating with parents and pupils"

"I like to use ICT as a diagnostic assessment. It can highlight individual weaknesses and areas in which I needed to research".

Q2. Have you had training and/or guidance in developing your understanding of assessment in post primary education?

Twenty out of 22 participants noted that they had received training/guidance in understanding assessment, with 1 participant stating no and the remaining participant stating they could not remember. The majority (6 participants) stated they had received this training/guidance throughout their studies,

"Assessment is a core part of each year's work".

The remaining noted they had received training through CPD courses (1 participant), or through tutors or 'on the job' experience (2 participants),

"Through CPD courses that I have chosen to do and colleagues"

"Yes, through my tutor, business lecturer"

"This has all been school led. I am a Senior Examiner for CCEA who scrutineers papers and has also marked before - again very little in the way of training, it has been on the job experience".

Some participants mentioned challenges in the training/guidance, such as a heightened emphasis on written assessment, or was not subject specific,

"However, a lot of focus is placed on paper assessments and not so much oral assessment."

“A lot of the training have seemed foreign and abstract due to not having the experience of actually doing it.

Q3. Do you feel that your initial teacher education programme has prepared you to confidently and competently implement a range of aligned assessment practices in your classroom?

In response to this question 14 participants stated ‘Yes’, 1 participant stated ‘No’ and 7 participants were ‘neutral’. Participants were keen to share improvements that could be implemented such as training being more tailored to specific subjects, more examples provided of how assessment works in practice and more training delivered in informal assessment methods. These are illustrated in the quotations below,

“Could be addressed in specific subjects and curriculum.”

“Within art and design there is no definite right or wrong only good and bad attempts at producing work. I have picked up experience over the years ‘on the job’”.

“More examples and demonstrations of assessment in the practice of PE would have been beneficial.”

“Preparation is mainly in the school and often there is a need for more guidance, but schools are busy places”.

“I believe more types of assessment needs taught, such as oral test-teach-test methods, where the class is challenged through questions at the start of the lesson.”

Subjects such as PE, Art and design were amongst the key subjects where assessment methods were more challenging, due to the creativity of the subjects and the perceived nuanced approach to grading.

Q4. Have you had any other training, guidance or support in assessment provided by somebody external to your teacher education programme?

Of the 22 respondents, 10 participants stated ‘Yes’ and 12 participants stated ‘No’ as illustrated in Fig 1.

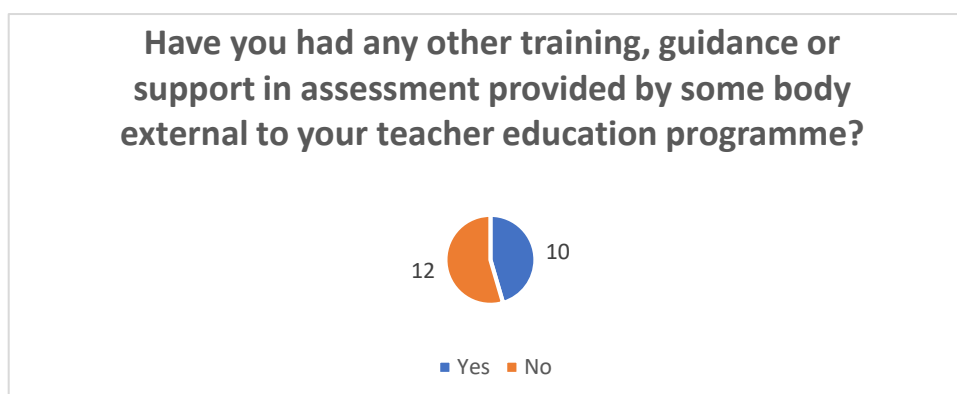


Figure 1: Training, guidance or support in assessment provided by somebody external to your teacher education programme.

The table below outlines the type of training noted by participants. It is clear that the in-service training at school was a key method of assessment knowledge acquisition, followed by training in the placement school as shown below in Table 1,

Type of Training	Number of Participants
CPD Courses	1
Placement School	2
CCEA	1
In service training at school	3
NCCA Booklets	1
When marking for LCA	1
Micro Teaching in School	1

Table 1: Types of training engagement

Q5. Where do you go to for information about using assessment in education?

When asked where participants sources information about using assessment in education, the majority of participants (8 participants) stated that Curriculum and Policy documents were a key source of information, followed by the CCEA website (6 participants). Figure 2 illustrated the other sources of information used by participants,

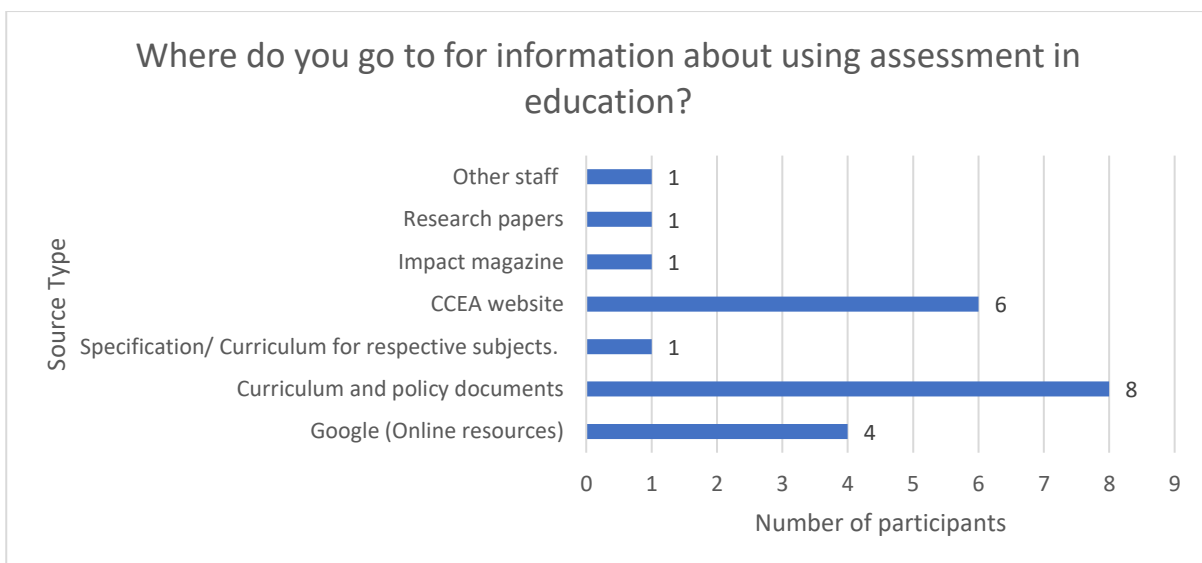


Figure 2: Sources of information used by participants to acquire knowledge of assessment.

Q6. How would you summarise the different purposes of assessment (e.g., Assessment for learning, assessment of learning, and assessment as learning)?

The majority of participants stated the main purpose of assessment in their context was to ensure pupils understood the lesson intention at the end. Table 2 illustrates other purposes for assessment used in the classroom.

Purpose	Respondent
Review end of a topic, chapter or term	2
Understanding the lesson intention at the end	15
In final exams	1
To help the learner identify own knowledge and understanding	1
Gauge student opinions towards certain topics	1
Further pupils' careers in education	1
N/A	1

Table 2: Purposes for assessment used in the classroom.

Q7. What are the challenges of assessment in (each of) your subject area/s?

In this question, participants were asked what to reflect on the challenges of assessment in their specific subjects (Figure 3):

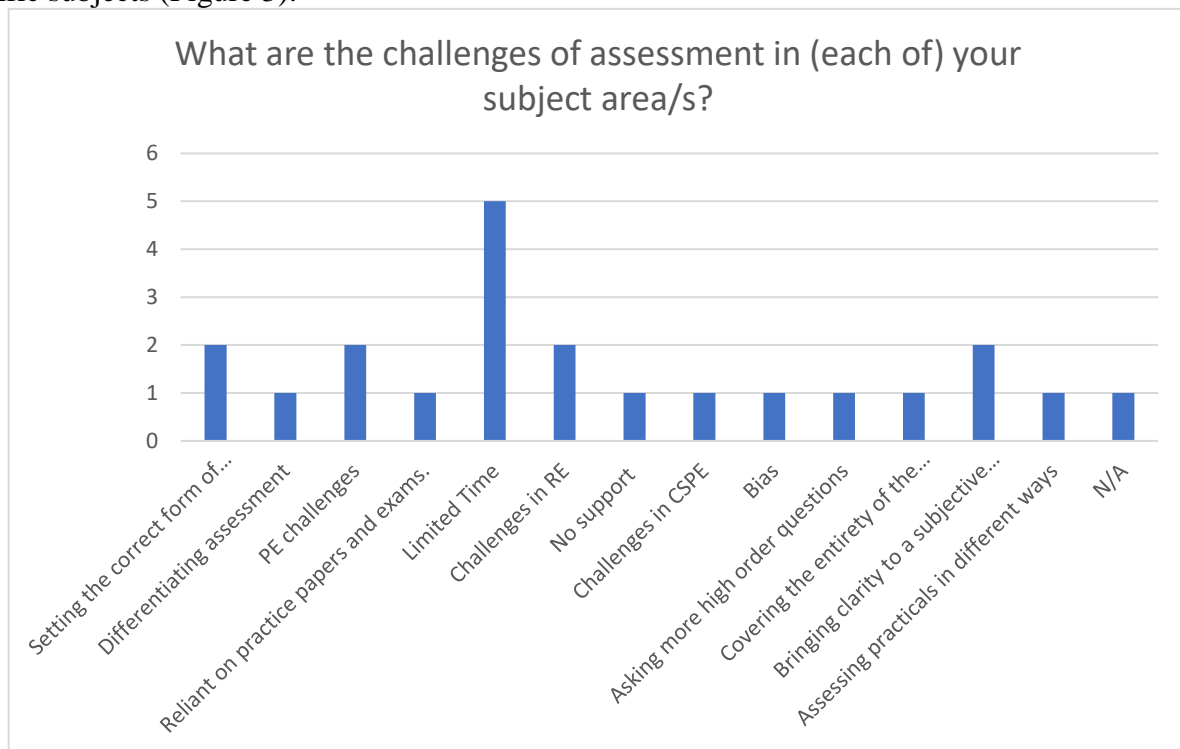


Figure 3: Challenges of assessment in their specific subjects

As can be seen from the graph above, time was a key factor in delivering effective assessment, with one participant commenting,

"It seems teachers are against the clock when it comes to covering their subjects and fulfilling the needs of an exam heavy load."

Similar to the previous responses in the survey, subjects such as PE and Religious Education (RE) are more difficult to assess due to both the non-classroom environment but also due to the reflective nature of RE,

The non-classroom environment of PE which makes assessment hard to control/monitor, and relies of peers to perform accurate assessments,

"Religious Studies is sometimes quite deep and reflective which means it doesn't lend itself as well to formal written assessments."

Q8. What additional supports do you need do you need in your assessment practice and how best could this support be provided?

The participants noted multiple methods and support mechanisms that could improve overall assessment practices such as more examples of assessment, class observations, increased lecturer guidance and more specific subject training to name but a few. Table 3 provides an overview of further suggested support needs and mechanisms required by the participants,

Support Needs	Responses
More examples of assessment methods	6
Further Training	3
Class observations	2
Project based in School (Placement)	1
Increased lecturer guidance	1
More subject specific	2
Unsure	4
More experience in classrooms	1
Collaboration with other staff	1
Digital input	1

Table 3: Overview of further suggested support needs and mechanisms required by the participants.

Participants commented they would like to be more creative in their assessment methods and engage with other teachers/colleagues to discuss assessment methods,

"How to be more creative in assessment strategies".

“Seeing what other teachers have used to assess their students and discuss what the strengths of each assessment method is”?

“Meetings with other professional to disseminate knowledge”.

Participants also noted that they would like more guidance in formative assessment methods as well as more ‘hands on’ experience’,

“Further information on formative assessment in mathematics would be helpful, as the majority of the time activities that work in other subjects do not translate well to maths, so it can be tough to be creative in a variety of formative assessment methods in maths.

“More hands-on assessments to do ourselves and evaluate after in the university classrooms”.

It is clear that team collaboration and knowledge sharing are a key intervention and requirement needed to progress innovation in assessment practices.

9. Discussion of Findings

Clearly, there is a growing body of evidence in support of the need for professional learning in assessment as learning. The emerging themes identified by the research include:

1. Early career teachers remain very nervous of ‘assessment’ practices beyond policy and curriculum advice.
2. Teachers (in-service practitioners) studying on CPD or master’s level programmes in Higher Education, valued the need for research and evidence-based assessment practices.
3. Professional learning in the field of assessment is deemed necessary by all disciplines/subjects/phases and career teachers (early and continuing).
4. Opportunities for professional upskilling and development in creative areas of assessment practices in a practical and research sense was viewed sector wide as an area of professional need to for the future.
5. Building communities and collaborative and knowledge sharing practice networks was viewed as a priority for the field of assessment now and in the future.
6. Assessment as learning was often described as assessment for learning or assessment of learning by students and practitioners (in-service) illustrating the need to explore the role of students as assessors in the assessment as learning model.
7. All respondents saw the benefit of co-agency with other professionals for improved assessment practices.

8. Students as assessors was not raised as a method or approach to assessment as learning except as a substitute for applied and practical assessment contexts.
9. Time was the biggest factor influencing teachers in their preparation for robust assessment practices.
10. Creativity and design were mentioned only lightly in respect of assessment as learning.

AaL in this project is based on the understanding that learning can occur when the opportunity for active participation in assessment is provided and congruent with a pupil’s motivational and metacognitive capacities (Winstone et al., 2016). It describes the active involvement of students as assessors in self-assessment and self-directed learning as a distinct function to improve the learning process (Schellekens, 2021).

Assessment as learning is part of the process of formative assessment and is a core component of the practice of teaching and the process of learning. The focus of formative assessment is to elicit evidence of learning during the learning process to enable learners and their teachers to use this information to support future learning (Black and Wiliam, 2018; Assessment Reform Group, 2002). AaL focuses on the role of the student in assessment as central to an understanding of the concept of AaL.

The insights from the questionnaire are thought-provoking in that they drill down into the facilitating and inhibiting factors that impact on teacher agency in assessment practices. In this project the concept of teacher agency is based on the ecological model proposed by Priestley et. al (2015) discussed earlier. Our themes explored in this study are analysed using this model as a framework for analysis of the factors that both inhibit and support student and in-career teachers’ understanding of and engagement with assessment as learning in their classrooms.

Theme	Sub-Theme
Teacher Agency	Facilitators
	Inhibitors
Cultural	Ideas, Values, Beliefs
	Discourses, Language
Structural	Social Structures
Material	Resources
	Physical Environment

(Based on Priestley et. al., 2015).

Two key themes were analysed using this model of teacher agency. These were:

1. exploration of the facilitating and inhibiting factors involved in implementing assessment as learning in the classroom.
2. analysis of the interaction between assessment practice and the cultural, structural and material factors that impact on teacher agency in practice.

Theme 1: facilitators and inhibitors to assessment for learning

One of the key themes explored throughout this project is the extent to which student and in-career teachers have the agency to engage in creative and values-based assessment as learning practices in the classroom.

The participants' experiences of assessment illustrate that there are both inhibiting and facilitating factors in relation to the enactment of AaL as part of an overall formative approach to assessment and as part of their broader assessment for learning practices in the classroom. The cultural scripts around assessment in school appear to funnel practice towards the technical. For example, the participants noted that summative modes of assessment dominate in school. They describe the focus on using assessment data to track student achievement, diagnose learning difficulties and provide data for communication with parents and teachers. These may inhibit more creative and formative modes of assessment. The fact that participants cite limited knowledge on how to implement creative and/or formative methods of assessment indicates a lack of agency in this area and implies that innovation and teacher responsiveness needs to be adequately scaffolded and supported to influence teacher practice. The implications of this are that there should be a two-pronged approach to support student and in-career teachers in this area. Firstly, they should have access to a suite of resources or activities to scaffold their work in assessment as and for learning. Secondly, their knowledge and awareness of the multiplicity of purpose in relation to assessment (beyond the technical) should be activated. Perhaps specific work in the theory and practice of formative feedback could expand assessment practice in reporting beyond data arising from formal exams.

It appears that balancing the need for disciplinary focused approaches to assessment and the more theoretical or academic approach to assessment is vital. The participants noted that while they were supported in learning about assessment, the enactment of good practice in the classroom remains a challenge. This suggests that programmes for initial and continuing teacher education should be both theoretical, allowing students to learn about the central concepts relating to assessment as learning, and practical with a focus on disciplinary specific aspects of assessment in practice.

Weaving specific focus on modes of formative assessment into pedagogy specific teacher education

modules would enable student teachers to apply theory to practice in their specific subject areas and perhaps allow for more meaningful assessment as learning practice. For in-career teachers, conceptualising existing good assessment practice as AaL could provide opportunities to expand on their practice as disciplinary experts and experienced teachers.

It is interesting to note the challenges experienced by teachers of practical and creative subjects such as Art and Design and PE. It appears that traditional modes of assessment and data about student achievement in the creative and practical subjects, may not provide a broad enough canvas on which to map out more formative and interactive modes of assessment.

The persistent issue of mapping theory to practice was threaded all the way through the teacher responses. It appears that here, as noted elsewhere (e.g., Van Der Kleij, 2022), the potential to develop assessment *as* and *for* learning is constrained by some confusion and lack of pedagogical knowledge about how to enact this in the everyday practice in the classroom.

The strong links that the respondents made between the purpose of assessment and the achievement of learning outcomes and intentions indicates that their concept of assessment as a tool for learning may be quite narrow. There is an opportunity here to develop and deepen assessment concepts beyond the achievement of learning outcomes and help teachers to conceptualise more deeply the multiple purposes of assessment and the opportunities to extend post-primary student independence through assessment as learning opportunities.

Time emerged as a significant constraint in the development of assessment practices. This indicates the necessity to embed the practice of assessment more seamlessly into the process of ordinary teaching and learning in the classroom.

Perhaps one of the most interesting findings relates to the commentary from participants that they would like more opportunities to collaborate with others in developing their practice, sharing issues and difficulties, progressing innovation, and observing other practices in the reality of the classroom. This makes the case for the development of a community of practice to share, extend and support a range of good practice across the post-primary education system, North and South.

Theme 2: Interaction between assessment practices and cultural, structural and material factors

One of the interesting findings to emerge from this project was the intersections between cultural, structural and material aspects of learning and the practice of enacting principles based AaL in the classroom. There are strong cultural scripts around assessment in society, particularly given the role of assessment in high-stakes exams and progression to higher education (Murphy and Baird, 2015). These scripts place high value on assessment that prepares students for exams and privileges

traditional modes of assessment that are seen to serve this purpose of second level education. This may diminish the value that post-primary school pupils place on more holistic and student-centred modes of assessment. The participants describe assessment that is focused primarily on the gathering of data for the purpose of tracking and diagnosing student achievement with the reporting of this data in communication with parents and pupils. This appears to be a well-established understanding of assessment that reinforced the impression that assessment is primarily about achievement and attainment as opposed to learning. This was also explored as a key issue in the conference and has indeed been a recurring theme in the research literature in this area (e.g., Swaffield and Rawi, 2023).

Pupils should be actively involved in assessment to become more skilled as assessors of their own and their peers learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998). This should also enable pupils to become better learners (Black et al., 2002). This signals a change in the traditional view of teachers as responsible for and facilitating learning (Black et al., 2003; James et al., 2007). Change in traditional teacher-pupil roles and relationships and the need for greater attention to be paid to modes of assessment that may facilitate student agency in assessment, even within the constraints of a high-stakes exam system in post-primary education, may signal a route to embed AaL in post-primary school classrooms.

10. Conclusions and Recommendations

This project had the following objectives:

1. To explore current understandings of the concept of AaL among post-primary student and in-career teachers enrolled in initial and master in education programmes in UCC and SUC.
2. To identify opportunities to develop student and in-career teachers' understanding of the concept of AaL and to identify the range of learning outcomes required to scaffold teachers' practice as they implement AaL practices in the classroom.
3. To organise a conference for academic staff, school partners and initial/in-career teacher education students with a keynote from a significant researcher in this area to develop understanding of the concept and stimulate debate and innovative practice in relation to assessment as learning.
4. To research the feasibility of designing a cross-border, synchronous and asynchronous online module to support student teachers and in-career teachers North and South in exploring, understanding and implementing best practice in assessment as learning approaches and processes.

The concept of AaL while viewed generically as an important and influential part of the learning process, appeared to be constrained by various factors identified by the teachers involved in this study. The data suggests that early career teachers and in-service professionals aligned AaL with generally formative assessment for learning strategies that support assessment pedagogies.

However, only a small number of teachers felt completely confident in their capacity to engage in more creative and disciplinary assessment practices and called for more professional learning in the future. The need to focus on developing student capacity as assessors was largely absent from the teachers' commentary. Perhaps this indicates the need to expand conceptual understanding of assessment as learning along with support on how to develop classroom assessment pedagogy that places students at the centre of the assessment process.

The following recommendations are offered for the future, noting the limitations of this study in terms of scope and scale:

1. Professional learning with co-agency should continue to inform teacher education partnerships in the area of AaL.
2. AaL practices should be developed both in undergraduate and postgraduate teacher education to include assessment pedagogies in a more holistic manner and using an evidence-based approach to professional development.
3. AaL strategies should assist the teacher (early career and in-service) in their endeavours to promote student learning and student capacities as assessors of their own and peers' learning with a focus on teaching through assessment pedagogies.
4. Modules that support the development of AaL pedagogies should align to good practice in assessment as learning and feedback pedagogies.
5. Feedback pedagogies should inform both the teacher education programmes for early career and professional development by design and practice promoting a robust instruction in support of good practice in 'assessment as' student learning.
6. Collaborative teacher education partnerships should be developed to sustain and support resource and design, while forming a comprehensive community of research informed practice.
7. Opportunities for embedded modular programmes of teacher education and micro-credentials should be considered for AaL professional development, where the cross-border online module from this project provides an evidence-based template to be piloted.

11. Assessment as Learning conference

1. Assessment as Learning Online Conference, Wednesday, 29th March 2023.

Keynote address: 'Assessment as Learning: Developing a Critical Understanding'.

Dr Sue Swaffield, Associate Professor, University of Cambridge Faculty of Education.

An online conference was jointly organised and hosted online by UCC and SUC with 96 participants from a range of contexts, disciplines, and jurisdictions. The guest speaker for the conference was Dr Sue Swaffield who presented her views and research on AaL, raising important discussions and reflections at and after the session. The project researchers then presented the initial findings from the study, and a proposal for a cross-border online module building on the project rationale and findings. The module design aims to create a way for teachers from both jurisdictions to collaboratively learn together to develop a conceptual understanding of AaL and explore the implications of a focus on AaL for classroom practice. All student teachers and M.Ed. students (post-primary) from the represented programmes in this study and in-service teachers were invited to participate. All teacher tutors from both jurisdictions were invited to participate. Partner school principals, deputy principals and teachers in Cork and Belfast were invited also.

2. Findings from the Conference

Some of the reflective quotes from the conference attendees are outlined below:

Living north of the North the border... isn't a reality as such, and it's clear there is no border in the importance of education and a developing shared understanding of assessment.

Great reminder that we should decide what assessment strategy works for our students, and not let assessment be the driving force in our classrooms.

Giving agency to learners will not only enhance their academic well-being but their personal well-being as well because it will increase learner esteem.

Assessment as learning-a collaborative process which moves learning forward.

I feel inspired and motivated to rethink assessment i.e., what is the reason for the assessments on my course and does it reflect the values and skills I wish the learner to have developed? Challenging! Loved the butterfly video and have already shared it for discussion with colleagues. Thank you again! two hours well spent!

Inspiring. Well done Stran and UCC. You role modelled the need for teachers to work together and to use research to empower the profession. Assessment 'as' learning - that is my new mantra - no more seeing it as the enemy!

What a thoroughly enjoyable two hours. We loved watching three professional teachers working for the good of our profession. Sue set the scene and you powered through with such strong findings (and only a small project). We want you to write a book as well as a module.

You are inspiring. Collaboration was my takeaway message as well as UX experience. Wow. Small to tall outcomes.

The video was empowering and visually served the conference - I am going to have to share this with everyone in my class (BEd Post Primary). Can you come and talk to us when the module is ready? We were texting each other to get people to come online. One of the best assessment workshops I have ever been to. We are keen to hear more.

No child should ever be left behind - assessment is the key to the pastoral teacher's future. Very strong and emotive discussions. We loved the collaboration Niamh, Celia and Joao.

You are so right! Assessment is causing stress and challenge for teachers (who want to do more in developing the learner) and also to learners - 'I am nothing' is not acceptable in the 21st century Ireland.

We want to do this module... When will it be ready?

Learning is assessment - I never thought I would ever say that. You have influenced me greatly this evening. More research and tuition please.

Assessment is about deep learning. It is time for change. We are the agents of that change. Can both Colleges set up a community of practice that helps us get in touch?

If we as teachers can model teaching, learning and assessment as a flexible, creative, inclusive process, then we can better support our students in becoming autonomous learners and in reaching their potential. Keeping the learner at the centre and taking ipsative approaches to assessment could make the difference between a Hannah and a Caraiosa, between feeling crushed or empowered by education, and the benefits will be lifelong.

Learning is a product of communication, collaboration and needs more than one draft.

3. Discussion of findings from the conference

The main themes to emerge from the conference mirrored many of the insights from the student/continuing education teacher participants. These included the importance of collaboration to explore common understandings and best practice in relation to assessment as learning and the importance of a principled and values-based approach to assessment *with* the student in the classroom. One of the main conclusions was the necessity to map out the role and purpose of assessment in student learning to ensure that it serves the learning needs of students. These themes and this overall conclusion will now be further elaborated.

Conference theme 1: Collaboration.

The idea that assessment is a collaborative activity is central to a socio constructivist view of the learning process. Individuals learn best when they participate in a social setting with the support of peers and their teacher and feel that they are valued participants in the learning process in the classroom (Shepard, 2000). This principle of collaboration with students is central to understanding the whole concept of assessment as learning and fundamental to the practice of AAL:

“Students are the supreme focus; their learning is the primary aim of AfL, and their active participation essential.” (Swaffield & Rawi, 2023, 24).

This important theme of collaboration with students leads to a deeper and more holistic definition of learning to learn as involving student autonomy. As one of the participants at the conference observed, it is the difference “*between feeling crushed or empowered by education, and the benefits will be lifelong*”. One of the key elements of AaL as a mode of assessment is that it focuses on students as assessors of learning in their subject areas. This was highlighted in the conference as a change and progression in assessment and an area that conference delegates were keen to explore in more detail.

Conference theme 2: Values and principles on which assessment is based.

The idea that assessment is a values-based practice resonated strongly at the conference. Swaffield (2023) used three case studies to explore the purposes, uses and the consequences of assessment. The first case was the young student, Hannah, from Diane Reay and Dylan Wiliam’s study of the impact of preparation for SAT exams on Year 6 students in the UK. Hannah articulated her profound fear to the researchers that she would fail the SAT’s and then she worried that consequently: “I’ll be a nothing” (Reay and Wiliam, 1999, p. 345). The next case was Ruth, a student who achieved maximum point in the Leaving Certificate exam and penned an Irish Times article outlining her approach to exam preparation where her overall conclusion was: “there’s no point in learning about stuff that’s not coming up in the exams” (20th September 2005). The final case was Caríosa, who also achieved maximum point in the Leaving Certificate and wrote about her attitude to exams in the Irish Times Newspaper (28th March 2023). Caríosa highlighted the importance of friends and extra-curricular activities which (along with hard work and independent learning) provided the balance needed to succeed. How does assessment connect these individual stories? Swaffield (2023) explored the values and principles underpinning assessment in the lives of these young people and the contrast between the procedural view of assessment (as technical and an end in itself) and the more holistic view of assessment as learning (as outlined by Caríosa in her story). This illustrated the potential of assessment to support (and not diminish) student agency in the school system.

During the conference, Swaffield (2023) used the acronym **LEAF** to illustrate the central principle underpinning student-centred assessment for the purposes of learning. This acronym highlights the following precept: **L**earning is **E**xplicit, promoting learner **A**utonomy, **F**ocusing on learning (not grades or other measurements of learning). This mission is at the heart of assessment as learning in that it recognises assessment as a valuable and enriching learning process designed to equip students as assessors with essential skills of self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation and engagement to negotiate their way through school and into lifelong learning as adults.

12. Overall conclusion: The interconnectedness of assessment and learning:

Assessment is not just acquiring and using data, it is about what is given value in classroom (Rinaldi, 2006). One of the interesting threads of discussion that emerged through this conference and the questionnaire data was exploring how assessment serves the needs of learners in the classroom. It amplified the message that developing assessment practices so that assessment at a formative time in the lives of post-primary school students meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of students to meet their own future learning needs is very important (Boud, 2000). Despite the well documented research highlighting the huge benefits of assessment for and as learning, there is still a persistent belief that assessment is more about attainment and achievement than learning. This also emerged as a finding from the questionnaire in the study. This belief shapes what is available to be learned in the classroom and may inhibit the important learning potential of assessment.

13. Reflective Summary

The three overarching questions underpinning the research in this project were as follows:

1. What are the opportunities and challenges in developing student and in-career teacher assessment knowledge and values and supporting their enactment of best assessment as learning (AaL) practice in post-primary schools North and South?
2. What would a model of good practice regarding AaL look like?
3. How will this model inform initial and continuing teacher education North and South?

The findings from the questionnaire and the conference are exploratory in focus and are designed to inform the next phase of this project and so they are necessarily tentative. Nevertheless, the implications are worthy of further consideration and perhaps future probing in later empirical research in this area. Three key areas for further research in this area arise from this research project where evidence was gathered from two different education systems in the North and South of Ireland:

1. Opportunities and challenges for developing, sharing and collaborating to foster knowledge, values and expertise in AaL in post-primary initial and continuing teacher education.
2. The need to develop a model of good practice and associated pedagogical resources to foster AaL in teacher education, North and South.
3. The need to explore creative and responsive practices in AaL that transfer well across contexts and subject boundaries.

The achievement of agency will always result from the interplay of individual efforts, available resources and contextual and structural factors as they come together in particular and, in a sense, always unique situations (Priestley, Biesta, Robinson, 2015, p. 2). The highly contextual nature of teachers' practice was revealed in this study as a factor in their enactment of classroom assessment. A refinement of teacher knowledge in AaL concepts and pedagogical resources would provide teachers, throughout the continuum of teacher education, with a range of possibilities to extend and develop student knowledge and participation in the assessment process.

14. Limitations of the project

This project was launched just before the COVID 19 pandemic. The suite of measures to protect public health designed to respond happened just as the survey was disseminated to student teachers just at a time when there were so many other pressing issues demanding attention including a pivot to online learning and the rapid and complete change to modes of delivery of education at all levels in the system. Due to the time bound nature of this project and the considerable impact of COVID 19 disruption over a much longer period of time than anticipated, this curtailed the size and scope of this project.

15. Next steps

With the completion of this phase of the project, the baseline findings provide a solid ground that sheds light on the AaL needs and learning preferences from student-teachers and in-career teachers engaging in masters level study. These findings were extended with the dissemination conference, providing important feedback from the practicing community on a proposed cross-border online module. This part of the project was designed as an exploratory and scoping exercise. The findings, conclusions and recommendations arising from this will be further analysed and refined as we begin the next phase of this project.

The next steps of this project will involve the design, development and piloting of the cross-border online module and potentially offering it as a UCC Digital Badge for student teachers and master's students in Ireland, North and South, through the universities online learning management systems (e.g., Canvas/Teams).

UCC Digital Badge in Assessment as Learning for Student and Early Career Teachers:

A digital badge is a validated representation of a skill, achievement earned, or knowledge gained. They can be displayed or shared online via a range of platforms including virtual learning environments, blogs, e-portfolios, and social media sites such as LinkedIn.

The design of a UCC Digital Badge enables the university to recognise non-accredited learning that supports the values and attributes the university seeks to foster. A digital badge is awarded by the university once an earner demonstrates competence in pre-agreed learning outcomes.

The badges refer directly to the university's seven essential values of: Creativity, Responsiveness, Transparency, Scholarship, Freedom of Expression, Integrity, Equality, Diversity and Respect.

These badges can be issued to UCC staff and students and non-UCC personnel.

This Digital Badge should provide participants with a clear sense of the contextual realities and the challenges in assessment and enable them to identify, critically discuss and evaluate how a variety of interrelated best practices may serve as a framework for effective assessment as learning practices in their specific contexts. Committed educators are professionally charged to work systematically to engage all stakeholders in diverse contexts in Ireland, North and South, in creative ways. This responsibility needs to be underpinned by a strong knowledge-base in assessment as learning theory and practice.

We will work with an Instructional Designer to scope out and explore the synchronous and asynchronous elements of the module and to develop our own expertise in online delivery of module outcomes.

On successful completion of the digital badge, participants will be able to:

- Reflect on and assess key concepts in assessment and engage in self-directed strategic planning and participate in focused online tasks designed to stimulate and enrich conceptual and pedagogical knowledge of different modes and practices of assessment.
- Generate a bank of effective pedagogical resources and strategies for a range of assessment as learning focused tasks and activities.
- Explore the necessary requirements for implementing effective scaffolding techniques in assessment as learning to induct students in assessment as learning practices.
- Critically review and evaluate the quality of aspects of their provision in relation to their evolving knowledge base for assessment as learning.
- Craft and utilise authentic materials to foster teacher and student agency in assessment as learning processes and practices.

- Demonstrate the ability to apply conceptual and pedagogical knowledge to the practice of assessment as learning in specific subject areas and the provision of intensive targeted disciplinary supports and interventions for post-primary school subjects across the curriculum in Ireland, North and South.

16. Bibliography

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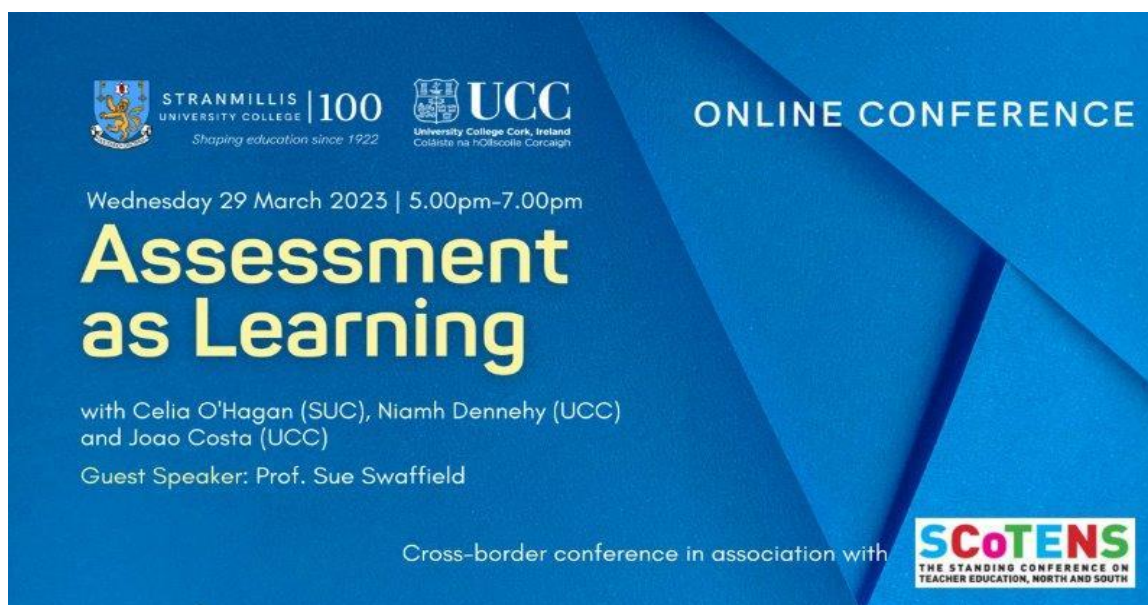
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17. Conference disseminations

Dennehy, N., O’Hagan, C., Costa, J. (2023) An overview of findings from a collaborative Scotens project on Assessment and Learning (AAL) in initial teacher education and teaching practice. *Paper presented at the joint UCC/SUC Assessment as Learning Conference, 29 March 2023, Online.*

Dennehy, N., O’Hagan, C. Costa, J. (2023) Developing a shared programme of support for student teachers in Ireland - North and South – in implementing best practice approaches to ‘Assessment as Learning’ (AAL) in post primary school. *Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the*

18. Appendix 1: Conference Schedule



CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

- 1. OPENING SPEAKER: 5.00pm-5.15pm**
Professor Kathy Hall, Professor of Education, University College Cork.
Professor Hall will open the conference and outline the history, aims, purpose and main achievements of the SCOTENS project.
- 2. KEYNOTE ADDRESS: 5.15pm-6.15pm.**
Dr Sue Swaffield, Associate Professor - University of Cambridge Faculty of Education
Dr Swaffield will focus on assessment as learning with a particular focus on how it can be used to support student autonomy in the process of learning. She will outline the challenges and opportunities of enacting assessment as learning in schools and consider implications for research and practice in this area.
- 3. PLENARY SESSION: 6.15pm-6.30pm**
Conference attendees will be invited to reflect on the keynote address and discuss implications for their own professional contexts.
- 4. PRESENTATION OF SCOTENS PROJECT: 6.30pm-6.45pm**
UCC/SUC Research team
The UCC/SUC team will present a brief overview of the project design, initial findings and future direction.
- 5. END OF CONFERENCE REFLECTIONS AND CLOSE OF CONFERENCE: 6.45pm-7.00pm**

19. Appendix 2: Abstract from ESAI Conference 2023

The concept of ‘Assessment as Learning’ is linked to a socio-constructivist approach to teaching and learning. It encompasses concepts such as self-regulation, self-efficacy, metacognition and feedback in learning and assessment practices (Shepard, 2000; Dann, 2014; Winstone et al, 2017; Swaffield, 2011). Many teacher education programmes incorporate modules focusing on assessment pedagogy and theory, however there is a lack of research on teachers’ experiences and enactment of best practice in this area.

This paper will describe a cross-border project which explores the learning needs of student teachers and in-career teacher enrolled in Masters in Education programmes in Ireland – North and South – in relation to assessment as Learning principles and practices and the planned response to these identified needs. It will describe how this project was designed, some initial findings, and the collaborative interactions that form the basis of continuing work on this project. This research study received SCOTENS seed funding and is aligned to the SCOTENS mission to facilitate teacher educators – North and South– in exploring education issues of common interest and establishing a sustainable education partnership on the island of Ireland.

The first phase of the project involved the distribution of a detailed online qualitative questionnaire (n=22) to initial teacher education students in University College Cork and in Stranmillis University College. The design of the questionnaire was focused on the what and how of teacher practice in this area. The “what” questions were informed by a social constructivist understanding of teaching, learning and assessment (Shepard, 2000). The “how” questions were based on the ecological model of teacher agency (Priestley et. al., 2015). Informed by the intersection of these what? /how? questions, the survey ascertained the views of teachers on the opportunities and challenges in developing early and in-career teacher assessment knowledge and captured their experiences and values in relation to assessment as learning.

The initial findings of this study reveal the range of challenges and opportunities identified by student teachers in enacting best assessment practices in school classrooms. A core value around the ambition to implement creative assessment practices was often in conflict with the pressure of accountability and the lack of time, confidence and opportunity to develop these practices in a meaningful way. The paper will conclude with a discussion describing the initial design of a cross-border, online module to develop teachers’ agency and collaboration skills, as well as their responsive approach to pupil learning, in the area of assessment as learning.