

# Chapter 4

## Effective Enactment of Assessment for Learning and Student Diversity in Australia

J. Joy Cumming and Fabienne M. Van der Kleij

**Abstract** This chapter examines implementation of Assessment for Learning (AfL) for diverse students, including students from diverse language and cultural backgrounds, and, in particular, for students with disabilities that affect their learning. Australian national education policy endorses AfL as effective teacher assessment practice. Australian education policy also promotes educational equity for all students, regardless of linguistic or cultural background, or disability, not only in terms of access to schooling but also in terms of access to a high quality and challenging education. This chapter provides an overview of Australian equity policy, the Australian federated system of education policy development and responsibilities, and the recent policy initiative of a national curriculum as context for AfL practice. We identify core principles of AfL with respect to teacher–student interactions for consideration of issues for curriculum and AfL implementation for diverse students. We then provide an overview of international research on AfL for these students. Four Australian examples of pedagogical interactions between teachers and students with disabilities are examined in terms of equity, curriculum, and AfL policy expectations. We conclude that to enact effective AfL for these students, while policy can and should provide an enabling framework, much at present depends on the individual teacher’s in-depth knowledge of students. To achieve effective and equitable implementation of AfL, further resources and professional development support are needed. Suggested guidelines are provided to enhance policy, practice, and research in AfL for diverse students.

### 4.1 Introduction

Australia has joined the international community in identifying Assessment for Learning (AfL) as a significant policy pillar in the focus on improvement of student learning, influenced, at least in part, by the early works of Crooks (1988), Sadler

---

J.J. Cumming (✉) · F.M. Van der Kleij  
Australian Catholic University, Brisbane, Australia  
e-mail: joy.cumming@acu.edu.au

(1989), Black and Wiliam (1998), and the Assessment Reform Group (ARG) (2002). The major policy statement of Australia's national education goals, the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs [MCEETYA] 2008), commits to 'world-class' assessment (p. 10). This incorporates external assessments but also classroom-based teacher assessment practices that focus on:

- assessment for learning—enabling teachers to use information about student progress to inform their teaching
- assessment as learning—enabling students to reflect on and monitor their own progress to inform their future learning goals
- assessment of learning—assisting teachers to use evidence of student learning to assess student achievement against goals and standards. (p. 14)

While assessment *of* learning addresses teachers' collection and use of assessment evidence for summative assessment purposes, Australia's national education goals explicitly promote both assessment *for* and *as* learning, resonating with international understandings of AfL.

The ARG (2002) defined AfL as '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 and how best to get there' (p. 2).

AfL has become intertwined in literature and practice with research on formative assessment. In this chapter, our AfL focus is on policies that promote ongoing teacher–student pedagogical interactions and feedback loops intended to improve individual student learning outcomes—the classroom dialogue both verbal and visual. Hayward and Spencer (2014) identify '*dialogue* (pupil–teacher and pupil–pupil)' as the 'key recurring element' to independent learning assessment processes that challenge 'learners to reflect on their own thinking and to make unconscious learning processes overt, so that they can be considered, discussed and improved' (p. 17).

The ARG identified four AfL principles that establish a framework for these teacher–student interactions and dialogues:

- focus on how students learn
- promotion of understanding of goals and criteria
- guidance on how to improve
- development of capacity for self-assessment (ARG 2002).

Guidance on how to improve, including feedback, is critical. Drawing on their own earlier work (Black and Wiliam 1998), as well as work by Ramaprasad (1983), Sadler (1989) and Black and Wiliam (2009) identified three key processes in classroom feedback to '[move] learners forward'—the need to establish where 'learners are in their learning,' 'where they are going,' and 'what needs to be done to get them there' (pp. 7–8). Black and Wiliam (1998) note Perrenoud's perception that these processes require 'an incursion into the representation and thought

processes of the pupil, to accelerate a breakthrough in understanding, a new point of view or the shaping of a notion which can immediately become operative' (Perrenoud 1998, p. 97). These interactions are necessarily shaped by the identity and context of the learner. Immediately, it is clear that these basic, yet conceptual, understandings of processes that improve learning may present challenges for teaching diverse students.

In this chapter, we identify five elements which engage all these principles and processes (based on ARG 1999; William and Thompson 2007) to consider their implementation for diverse students, that is, students with linguistic and cultural difference, and with disabilities, and the extent to which AfL practice with these students can achieve Australian assessment policy goals. The five elements are:

- determining how students learn and learning progressions
- sharing learning expectations
- questioning to gauge knowledge and understanding
- provision of feedback for learning improvement
- development of student capacity for self-assessment.

The following sections (i) describe the Australian education policy context for equity, curriculum, and AfL; (ii) provide an overview of available research on AfL for diverse students; (iii) consider implementation of the five identified AfL elements for students with disabilities through four examples; (iv) discuss implications for diverse students and provide recommendations for policy, practice, and research.

## 4.2 Equity, Curriculum, and Assessment Policy Contexts for Australian Schools

Australian school students have diverse cultural, social, and linguistic backgrounds. For example, nearly 30 % of students in New South Wales' government schools have English as a second language (Department of Education and Communities 2011). Over five per cent of students identify as Indigenous Australians of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander culture (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2015), many of whom may also speak a home language other than English. More than one in ten Australian students may have identified disabilities (PricewaterhouseCoopers 2013), the majority attending mainstream schools with varying degrees of support. Australian students progress through school with their age (social) cohort, not according to their achievement level. Hence, every Australian school classroom will present challenging complexity of diversity and individual student needs for teachers.

The Melbourne Declaration commits to equity and excellence in education for all, not only in discipline learning needs but also in affective outcomes that impact on future life quality (MCEETYA 2008). Students are to be successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens. The

Declaration identifies that Indigenous students, students from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds, and students with disability are not achieving equitable outcomes. Strategic initiatives to improve equity in opportunity and outcomes for these students are highlighted in the Declaration as priority policy initiatives for Australian education.

These policy initiatives are supported by Australian legislation. Antidiscrimination legislation exists at federal, state, and territory levels to prevent discrimination on grounds of characteristics such as race, culture, gender, sexuality, disability, or religion. Specific subordinate antidiscrimination legislation, the *Disability Standards for Education 2005* (Attorney-General 2005), addresses education provision for students with disabilities. Overall, these students are to be provided with access to curriculum and programs on a similar basis to students without disabilities, and more specifically, are to be assessed in ways appropriate to the circumstances that enable them to demonstrate their learning.

The Australian policy framework, supported by legislation, therefore mandates and endorses equitable and high quality world-class education for all students. It prioritises AfL as world-class assessment practice to benefit learning of all students. As a corollary, AfL is therefore an implicitly critical assessment practice to enable students from diverse language and cultural backgrounds or with disability to achieve equitable learning outcomes.

#### ***4.2.1 The Australian Curriculum and Student Diversity***

Australia has a federated system of education responsibility. The *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (MCEETYA 2008) is the third and most recent national statement of education goals since the first in 1989. Their significance for Australian education is the collaboration of all state and territory ministers and the federal minister of education to develop a common education policy framework for all Australian students.

The Declaration's goal of a common curriculum framework has been achieved; a new national Australian Curriculum has been under development by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) since 2008. This Curriculum has a three dimensional structure: learning areas (disciplines/subjects); General Capabilities (essential 21st-century skills); and cross-curriculum priorities. The curriculum is standards-based and provides qualitative descriptors of expected achievement standards for each Year level in each learning area.<sup>1</sup> While the Australian Curriculum provides the common content framework, curriculum implementation and school assessment remain the responsibility of state and territory authorities.

---

<sup>1</sup>The Australian Curriculum along with supporting resources and guidance are accessible online ([www.australiancurriculum.edu.au](http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au)).

The Australian Curriculum addresses the Melbourne Declaration goal of equity and student diversity. ACARA (2013b) is ‘committed to development of a high-quality curriculum for all Australian students that promotes excellence and equity in education. All students are entitled to rigorous, relevant and engaging learning programs drawn from challenging curriculum that addresses their individual learning needs’ (p. 4).

A core Curriculum proposition is that ‘each student can learn and... the needs of every student are important’ (ACARA 2012, p. 10). Guidelines suggest application of the following process to address students’ diverse learning needs:

1. Identify suitable learning area content considering the students’ age.
2. Modify teaching if needed drawing from different Year level content, using the General Capabilities and/or cross-curriculum priorities to modify the learning focus, or align individual learning goals with age-appropriate learning content.
3. Assess students against curriculum standards or according to individual learning goals (ACARA 2013b).

Guidelines and a language learning continuum are available for students with English as an Additional Language or Dialect, with advice that these students ‘may require additional time and support’ to learn (ACARA 2015). Literacy and Numeracy continua have also been developed within the General Capabilities to assist individual planning for students with disabilities. The starting proposition, however, is that individualised curricula for students should be based on age-appropriate content, that is, while student learning may not be at the same level as that of other students, students will still experience the full curriculum. Although ACARA does not have responsibility for implementation of school assessment, a state and territory responsibility, the Australian Curriculum website provides exemplars for practical guidance in such adaptive planning. State and territory authorities and school sectors (Government, Independent [both faith and nonfaith based] and Catholic) are expected to provide teachers with more specific policy and support.

While the Melbourne Declaration indicates that teachers should engage with assessment *for* and *as* learning, the Australian Curriculum states only that teachers should practise ongoing formative classroom assessment to continuously inform teaching and learning. Again, specific guidance is a state and territory responsibility.

We note that Australia may present a different teacher practice scenario from other countries. Given historical development of curriculum and policy at state and territory systemic levels and legislative and financial controls, school practice must be compliant with these curriculum and policy expectations (Cumming and Mawdsley 2012). While enactment of curriculum and policy at the classroom level will always differ from official expectations, they will be aligned. A study already undertaken of teacher implementation of the Australian Curriculum in the subject English found that while teachers developed their own resources, approximately three-quarters of the study’s respondents identified state and territory curriculum documents as important for long-term planning, with half using them in short-term planning (Albright et al. 2013).

### ***4.2.2 Assessment for Learning Policy and Guidance at State and Territory Level for Diverse Students***

Compatible with national policy goals, assessment policies of each Australian state and territory education authority endorse AfL as a key component of expected teacher assessment practice. Australian state and territory authority websites refer to the need for all teachers to undertake assessment for, as, and of learning, frequently listing the Black and Wiliam (1998) or ARG (2002) generic principles. For example, the Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority references AfL principles within all curriculum areas. The Board of Studies of New South Wales identifies AfL as ‘quality assessment that has had world-wide success in enhancing teaching and improving student learning’ (2015, paragraph 1). The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development in Victoria identifies the primary purpose of assessment as improvement of student learning (2013). Online professional development modules addressing generic AfL principles are provided to guide in-school workshops.

State and territory education authorities also provide policy and guidelines addressing equity and inclusive practices in education and provision for diverse students. General principles are that instruction should meet each student’s needs, with suggestions provided for different forms of summative assessment evidence, such as observations and anecdotal observations, or modifications or adjustments in formal summative assessments. What is missing at the state and territory level are the policies and guidance for teachers that integrate AfL with the learning characteristics and needs of these students, and provide specific consideration of implications of the interaction of AfL and the learning of these students. Thus, the only practical guidance available to Australian teachers for working with students from diverse language and cultural backgrounds or with disability and AfL is at the national level.

The following section considers research on AfL for these students to inform what policy guidance should be provided for the Australian national, state, and territory educational context.

## **4.3 Research on AfL for Diverse Students**

Limited research has addressed the role of AfL for the diversity of students encountered in classrooms today, including students with different language backgrounds from the language of instruction, different cultural backgrounds, or students with disabilities. Black and Wiliam’s informing review of empirical research (1998) reported positive effects for the majority of students, including low attaining students. However, the learning outcomes and diversity of students, beyond characterisation as disadvantaged or low achieving, investigated in the review are limited. Fuchs and Fuchs (1986) reported positive effects for

‘systematic’ formative assessment for students with disabilities (predominantly ‘mildly handicapped’) operationalised as twice-weekly ‘curriculum-based data collection [excluding non-academic behaviours] ... with decisions concerning the adequacy of programs formulated on an individual, not a group, basis’ (p. 201). Fuchs et al. (1997) found that task-focused goals and self-referenced assessment feedback based on a weekly classroom test improved outcomes for low achieving students but not for students with identified learning disabilities. While these studies incorporated aspects of AfL, they did not reflect ongoing daily teacher–student learning interactions.

A methodological issue is that quantitative empirical research on effective practices for diverse students, especially children with disabilities, generally treats students with diverse characteristics as a homogenous group, obscuring positive individual outcomes (Cumming 2012; Pitoniak and Royer 2001). The nature of knowledge construction (ways of knowing), different learning progressions, interaction of assessment and culture, and the individuality and idiosyncrasy of learners with disabilities present challenges for effective AfL because of the different ways in which diverse learners both learn and are able to demonstrate their learning (Abedi 2010; Bourke et al. 2011; Cumming 2012; Ravet 2013).

Trumbull and Lash (2013) provide a comprehensive overview of formative assessment principles and potential unintentional effects for diverse students. They identify formative assessment as a process aligned with teaching designed to examine the nature of students’ understanding and to advance student agency. As Trumbull and Lash note, emphasis on ‘closing the gap’ through feedback necessarily requires implicit or explicit conceptualisation of the nature of the intended learning progression. However, they also note that few curriculum sequences are empirically developed, although in Australia, as elsewhere, such sequences underpin most instructional planning and assessment. Diverse students, such as students with cultural diversity or learning disabilities, may not fit with standard expected learning progressions. Baird et al. (2014) noted that alignment of ‘current understandings of formative assessment’ with different learning theories would ‘be reflected in differing formulations and practices’ (p. 30). This must similarly apply for different progressions of learning and *different* students.

### 4.3.1 AfL, Language, and Cultural Diversity

Trumbull and Lash (2013) examine implications of formative assessment principles for students with language backgrounds different from the language of instruction and with different cultural knowledge and experience. To be successful learners, students must develop several knowledge structures simultaneously, the instructional language, the intended curriculum content, and, often, the culture of interaction. Complex linguistic text may pose a barrier to demonstration of knowledge by students learning in a second language (Abedi 2010). Using different communication modes such as nonlinguistic or visual modes could provide more valid

information on which to base feedback. Thus, the key recurring element of dialogue in AfL may be problematic in these learning contexts.

Differences in the home *cultural script* of parent-child conversations may also mean students need scaffolding in the classroom discourse promoted in generic discussions of AfL processes. Students from different cultural environments may have different understandings of social roles within classrooms. Teacher questioning intended to elicit student understanding can be impacted by cultural differences, leading teachers to wrongful interpretation of the extent of student learning. As an example, in some cultures, direct questioning or being singled out are not culturally appropriate. Trumbull and Lash (2013) note that among Native American groups, dichotomous *right-wrong* approaches are not cultural practice: ‘Teachers not privy to the communication norms in some communities may at times be introducing non-target [learning goals] into assessment by using ... formative assessment practices that are most accepted (e.g., questioning students during a whole group discussion)’ (p. 12).

Cultural reactions to praise may be another source of difference. Hence, teachers need to know their students as individuals and tailor practices to be culturally sensitive and appropriate. No research has been identified on AfL and Australian Indigenous students. In one study of teacher assessment that interviewed over 100 teachers of these students (Klenowski 2014), some reported use of approaches identified as AfL practice, for example, asking open-ended questions, providing feedback to inform students how to improve, and student agency in assessment processes. Cultural interactions, however, were not the focus of the study.

### 4.3.2 *AfL and Students with Disabilities*

The Melbourne Declaration (MCEETYA 2008) addresses equitable educational opportunity for all students, including students with disability, and the ideal of AfL, but without explicitly linking the two. The Australian Curriculum implicitly links the two but without a clear policy bridge. The European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (EADSNE) (2009) specifically examined AfL for students with special education needs and noted that foundational AfL work was based on students without such needs. Drawing on conversations with project experts, EADSNE noted the importance of AfL principles for all students, our own starting point. The experts considered that classroom interactions such as questioning were possible with students with special education needs as long as the question and answer modes used different stimuli, for example ‘visual versus verbal stimuli’ (p. 5), and modes compatible with students’ capabilities. Encouraging self-reflection and development of metacognitive skills were identified to be as desirable for students with special needs as for other students. A core practical issue identified for AfL, but unresolved, is how to involve learners with ‘profound difficulties’ (p. 4) in feedback loops and self-reflection.

Ravet (2013) has undertaken a comprehensive critical evaluation of the suitability of recommended generic AfL principles for students on the autism spectrum, drawing mainly on Black and Wiliam's work (e.g., 1998, 2009). She identified that many principles, including 'opportunities for pupil interaction, teacher/pupil dialogue, high quality feedback to pupils and pupil self and peer assessment' (p. 950), were problematic and most likely counter to improving these students' learning. Students with autism have different ways of knowing and interacting—'a different way of perceiving information; a different way of experiencing the world, a different way of coding, storing and retrieving in memory; and a different role of the emotions in processing these elements' (p. 953, citing Powell and Jordan 2012). Common characteristics of autism include difficulties in communications and interactions with others, behavioural concerns, and tendency to focus on detail rather than the whole. However, students can also have learning strengths to draw on, including deep knowledge, objectivity, enjoyment of individual work, strong focus, and persistence.

Ravet (2013) concludes that the 'majoritarian' view of learning (p. 954) promoted through generic approaches results in issues related to (1) inferences from evidence of student learning and (2) communication. Firstly, knowing where students are in their learning is integral to AfL, but limited teacher understanding of autism may lead to biased inferences that the teacher is not aware of, with negative impact on validity of subsequent instructional actions. The inferential process in day-to-day classroom judgements of learning is highly influenced by teachers' subconscious beliefs and intuition (Bennett 2011; Ravet 2013). Secondly, communication difficulties for many learners with autism pose challenges for interactive classroom processes such as peer assessment, social interaction, and metacognitive feedback (Ravet 2013). Ravet proposes adaptations to Black and Wiliam's (1998) formative assessment activities to be inclusive for students on the autism spectrum. These adaptations in practice require teachers both to be flexible and to have thorough understanding of autism.

While feedback is a key process in AfL, in practice, feedback often takes the form of praise, identified in research as least effective for student learning. Feedback is identified as most effective when it focuses on the learning (the task, process, or metacognitive strategy), not the student (Black and Wiliam 1998; Hattie and Timperley 2007). Research has established that the effectiveness of feedback for learning relates to characteristics of the feedback (content, timing), the types of learning outcomes (Shute 2008; Van der Kleij et al. 2015), and learner characteristics such as ability levels (Shute 2008). However, this research, again, has focused on what is effective for the majority of learners. The further question, then, is what type of feedback is most effective for students with different nature and extent of disability.

A further issue raised in education of students with disabilities is the construction of Individual Education Programs (IEPs). Many Australian researchers have criticised these in the past as narrowing curriculum opportunities and creating a *deficit* approach to learning, hindering inclusion, and encouraging low expectations by teachers (Carrington and MacArthur 2012; Shaddock et al. 2007). The Melbourne

Declaration and Australian Curriculum directly address this issue through principles of high expectations for all. Despite good intentions, however, individualised plans may result in exclusion of students from potential classroom interactions with peers and AfL opportunities—the ‘IEP goals become a separate curriculum’ (Carrington and MacArthur 2012, p. 278).

#### 4.4 AfL for Students with Disabilities: Learnings from Australian Examples

In this section we draw on four examples of pedagogic interactions between teachers and students with disabilities to discuss their consequences for AfL implementation.

The first two examples draw upon Australian classroom research data. The following two examples are drawn from the national resources available to Australian teachers to support enactment of equity policy in the Australian Curriculum, *Illustrations of Personal Learning*, to guide teachers in personalising curriculum for students with diverse needs and to ‘demonstrate how the integrity of the learning areas ...[can be] maintained while addressing individual learning needs’ (ACARA 2013b, p. 18).

While none of the examples discussed in this section were intentionally based within AfL practices, each raises consideration of at least one of the five core elements on which we have focused:

- determining how students learn and learning progressions
- sharing learning expectations
- questioning
- provision of feedback for learning improvement
- development of student capacity for self-assessment.

*The first example* involves an inclusive classroom learning activity incorporating a performance sheet with criteria (dimensions of performance) and standards (dimensions of quality) to establish parameters of a writing task. The teacher is implementing assessment that can be used as assessment *of* learning within a framework that uses AfL practices to scaffold student learning, in accord with general state (Queensland) assessment policy expectations. The student, in the last year of primary school, Year 7 (approximately 12–13 years old), had ongoing literacy learning needs (Colbert and Cumming 2014). This teacher–student interaction sequence draws on a longitudinal project reported elsewhere (Wyatt-Smith et al. 2007). It involves interviews with and between the teacher and student, and classroom work collected over the year. Although the student engaged with the same content and completed the same task as other students, even prior to current Australian Curriculum expectations, the teacher modified his performance expectations by using simplified and fewer criteria. The student was assessed against

modified standard categories: *developing*, *developed*, and *highly developed*. The performance sheet formed the basis of verbal and visual dialogue between the teacher and student on several occasions, scaffolding the student's learning and work, with expectations refined iteratively over time. Both the teacher and student provided assessments of his progress, by shading or dots on the sheet, engaging student reflection and agency. The student identified specific improvement goals based on the performance expectations. As time progressed, he asked for expectations to be raised both in terms of the number of criteria and standards of performance, and made more similar to those of his peers.

While the available data did not provide information on teacher–student questioning or verbal feedback on the task, this example demonstrates AfL principles for a student with a literacy learning disability within mainstream curriculum. The performance sheet detailed expectations, was used to provide ongoing feedback, enabled adaptation of goals as the student's learning progressed, was used to scaffold the classroom dialogue, and the student's own motivation, and served to improve his engagement and facilitate his learning. The assessment processes were in accord with curriculum and policy expectations for both a student with specific learning needs and AfL. However, the critical element was the teacher's knowledge of the student's capabilities and flexibility to adapt expectations to match these initially, shaping feedback within an appropriate learning progression. Critical also was the student's willingness to engage with feedback and improve his learning. While written literacy was a difficulty for this student, verbal interactions were not.

*The second example* is taken from a small research project undertaken in 2014 investigating the usability of a new State policy development, a curriculum document, the Guideline for Individual Learning (GIL) (Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority [QCAA] 2014) to implement the Australian Curriculum policy expectations for students with disability and frame their learning. The GIL is designed to align education goals for students with mild, moderate to severe intellectual and/or physical disabilities with the Australian Curriculum. Students completing Years 11 and 12, the last two years of secondary schooling (approximately 17–19 years old), receive a Queensland Certificate of Individual Achievement (QCIA) on successful attainment of their individual goals. The GIL reflects the core policy proposition of the Australian Curriculum that the starting point for individual student curricula is age-appropriate content. Assessment advice within the GIL provides an explicit, but not elaborated, link between generic formative assessment principles and learning of students with disabilities; it is stated that assessment should 'promote, assist and improve teaching and learning' by providing 'regular feedback to students about how they can improve their learning' (p. 8).

Semi-structured interviews with principals and teachers in three schools (two special education and one inclusive education setting) discussed the penultimate version of the GIL and its implications for assessment. This example involves three students in one of the schools: a student with a speech language disability, a student with an intellectual impairment, and a student with autism spectrum disorder (high anxiety). The three students were undertaking studies towards a vocational

certificate as well as the QCIA in an inclusive education setting. Summative assessment and reporting for each of these students occurred through judgements against qualitative criteria and standards as well as a competency checklist. However, a number of areas directly relating to AfL principles emerged from the interviews.

In this setting, teachers worked together with the GIL framework to translate coarse-grained Australian Curriculum standards into curriculum-consistent but different achievable learning goals to suit each student. They tracked the learning gains of the students, and reviewed goals and lesson plans every few weeks. Continuous feedback was provided verbally (as reported by staff) and through students' work. Goals from the overall curriculum were chunked into smaller manageable 'bites' that were scaffolded until evidence of successful achievement could be documented. This was seen as critical to student success. Scaffolding related not only to development of specific vocational skills but also to students' development to independent learning. For the student with autism, this was undertaken first through the student observing her teacher undertaking a task, then the teacher and student working jointly, until the student had confidence and skill to work independently. AfL emphasises explicit goal setting and sharing of criteria for success. Often in mainstream curriculum, as in the Australian Curriculum, final summative performance expectations identify large-step learning goals for the end of a school semester but do not elaborate implicit or explicit stages to be achieved on route to these goals (Popham 2008). In this example, the shared bite-sized learning goals reflected simultaneously the underpinning curriculum, that is, the content or skill that was the overall goal, and the learning progressions for each student to develop independent work skills. The new policy development of the GIL with explicit curriculum, generic advice on assessment, and use of rubrics to judge student achievement enabled this work by teachers. However, once more their effective enactment of the policy was still very dependent on their own experience and strategies in working with these students.

Self-assessment is a key principle of AfL, endorsed in assessment policies across Australian education with very limited empirical investigation for students with disabilities. A further observation from this example was that student self-assessment capability, becoming 'reflective and self-managing' (ARG 2002, p. 20), was achievable for these three students. Digital portfolios, recorded on iPads, provided the achievement evidence base. Teachers shared with students the outcomes they were to achieve and gave students responsibility to determine their own evidence. Students took photos of their work, screenshots of internet search histories, or were videoed undertaking tasks such as reading a newspaper aloud. Students emailed these to the staff member compiling the portfolios. Given the multitude of learning evidence collected, the students were also charged by teachers with determining what evidence best represented their learning outcomes. Staff reported that not only was better evidence collected than previously when undertaken by classroom aides, student agency in data collection greatly increased their engagement with their learning. The use of technology proved to be highly effective for these students with disabilities.

I've never seen kids who have this kind of impairment interact with technology so well... all because we're saying we need this kind of evidence and they're aware of how technology can provide that evidence. (Head of Learning–Learning Enhancement)

As noted, the Australian Curriculum is intended to provide a curriculum for all students, with several policy guidelines available online to assist teachers in adapting the Curriculum to suit individual learning needs for diverse students. The final two examples are drawn from online vignettes provided as Australian Curriculum teacher resources on identification and implementation of appropriate learning pathways for students with moderate to severe intellectual and physical disabilities.

*Vignette 1* (ACARA 2013a) explores one teacher's curriculum planning for seven students with moderate to significant intellectual disability, ranging from five to nearly 13 years old. All students have individualised curriculum plans, aligned with Australian Curriculum General Capabilities continua. Communication goals are a strong focus. In the vignette, the teacher combines age-appropriate curriculum content with learning goals suited to her students' individual education programs, aligning her judgement of student learning to these multiple individual goals. Several tools support communication in teacher–student interactions, including symbols, iPad applications, and a communication book. Physical objects are used for effective questioning. For example, students are asked 'what's your favourite boat or ship in the book?' [book with pictures of boats]; a child makes a sound, the teacher follows up:

With your pointing finger [teacher touching child's finger].  
That's right, with your pointing finger.  
Which boat was your...  
(GASPS) You're touching that one which is the...

The teacher's feedback is on both content and reinforcement of the process for communication. Student agency in the learning process involved freedom to choose a writing topic related to the boat theme. In the second part of the vignette, the teacher conducts a science experiment with these students, focusing on forces and two floating boats, contextualised through a recent boating experience by the students. Variables such as the types of sail and weights in the boats were changed, and students were asked to predict which boat would finish first. Again, student questioning takes place in the form of offering them a concrete choice: a blue or a red boat. While questions are phrased directly, the teacher verbalises fully the differences between the boats, encompassing sophisticated scientific principles. Through feedback the teacher scaffolds students' behaviour and communication, as well as their cognitive development in line with the curriculum. She has clear understanding of the learning progressions of these students in all these areas. Given communication constraints, while the teacher shared learning expectations with the students, she must infer their understanding and internal processes through her knowledge of the students (Perrenoud 1998). Her questioning and feedback are constant, using verbal, visual, and physical stimuli (EADSNE 2009). Student agency is facilitated, not necessarily through self-assessment, but through student choice in activity.

*Vignette 2* (ACARA 2013c) is about a teacher reflecting on a lesson with students with significant intellectual and physical disabilities still acquiring basic communication skills. The lesson uses an age-appropriate Australian Curriculum Geography topic on landscape forms (Uluru) for Year 8 students (approximately 13–14 years old) to develop sensory and communication skills within the general capability Literacy Continuum. The lesson uses the physical resource of clay to create an Uluru shape and focuses on development of recognition and understanding of the phrase ‘who wants a turn’ in conjunction with the ‘turn’ sign, and the personal development of turn-taking. Some students have intentional communication. For others, she is working to build intention and association through repetition—‘I assign the meaning for now.’ Multiple goals are established through age-appropriate curriculum, and personal development and literacy capabilities. The extent to which these are shared with and understood by the students must again be inferred by the teacher. In this context of teaching and learning, the teacher says that knowledge of individual students is paramount—teachers ‘must understand the learner and who they are.’ The teacher also creates an implicit personal development goal through establishing positive bonds with the students. In the vignette, she looks around the students and asks ‘Who would like a turn?’ [with sign of hand turning]. When a student looks at her, she responds ‘Taylor you’re looking at me so I’m going to give you a turn’ [repeating hand sign with the word ‘turn’]. Further feedback to Taylor is provided by the teacher, while close to and looking into Taylor’s face, saying to the whole group: ‘I think Taylor likes the gritty feeling of Uluru.’ Taylor smiles in response. For another student, the teacher says ‘Good work Shane [thumbs up sign], I love the way you’re experiencing our Uluru.’ How do these interactions fit within AfL principles? Is the feedback being given task versus student oriented? Is it a combination? In this context do different principles of praise versus task feedback, as compared to those identified in ‘majoritarian’ principles (Ravet 2013, p. 954), apply to motivate ongoing learning? This is just one area where we need more research on effective AfL practices for all students.

## 4.5 Conclusion

Australian assessment policy, both through the Melbourne Declaration (MCEETYA 2008) and state and territory guidance, endorses teachers’ AfL practice for all students. Generic principles of AfL are referenced extensively. A question that arises is the degree of support provided to teachers in implementing both curriculum and these principles of AfL, particularly for diverse students, that is, in our discussion, students from diverse language and cultural backgrounds, and students with disability. The examples we discuss are clearly sited within Australian equity, curriculum, and assessment policy contexts at national, state, and territory levels. Our analyses of the teacher–student interactions in the four examples with students with disability show that the teacher practices are consistent with AfL

principles, even though AfL was not the primary focus of the examples. We also infer that these teachers' practices are informed and enabled by Australian curriculum and assessment policies and embedded school assessment practices. The Australian Curriculum age-appropriate alignment for equity in learning for diverse students that provided a new and challenging environment for the teachers and frames the learning goals in three of the four examples. We cannot, of course, generalise the practices of these teachers to all Australian teachers working with diverse learners, whether due to disability, culture, or language. However, we consider the broad Australian policy frameworks of equity, high expectations for all, and AfL should enable teachers to engage with AfL assessment principles for all students to promote learning.

The four examples involve a range of disabilities from a student with a learning disability affecting literacy, to students with various disabilities in inclusive mainstream education, to students who are nonverbal (cannot communicate by English language) and in some cases preintentional (cannot necessarily verbally or by sign indicate preference or intentions). The main finding that emerges from these examples using an AfL analysis framework is that while policy enables AfL practice, knowing the student is the primary informant of all elements of teachers' AfL practice. There is a gap between the broad expectations of policy and guidance, and the intensive teacher–student interactions of the classroom. Policy and official documents can never replace the expert teacher. However, the challenge for AfL is the creation of sufficient policy guidance and support to enable all teachers to move more rapidly on the pathway to expertise that integrates AfL practices with their knowledge of their students.

Our analyses of the examples in conjunction with the overview of research on AfL for diverse students highlight how much more research in this area is still needed. Our starting point is that if AfL is effective practice it should be enacted with all students. However, the examples presented in this chapter challenge the way generic AfL is currently advocated from the majoritarian perspective. We suggest the following guidance for policy, practice, and future research on AfL, especially for these students. A quandary in Australia continues to be who will have the responsibility for such research and development and support for the professional development of teachers. While common sense indicates that resources at the national level tied to the Australian Curriculum, as discussed in the two vignettes here, are most practicable, the need may be for policy, research, and practical guidelines to be developed at different systemic levels to enhance the work of teachers.

Firstly, policy makers should endorse, and researchers should undertake, further empirical research into effective implementation of AfL for diverse students, including diversity related to language and cultural backgrounds, and disability. In addition to examining the implications of currently advocated AfL principles for these students, such research should examine the implications of the implicit and explicit learning progressions that must inform AfL.

Explicit policy and resources are needed for teachers, and students and parents, to bridge the link between AfL and learning by students with diverse needs. These

should both draw on and enhance the empirical research evidence base for effective AfL principles and practices for these students. It is important that such policy and resources reflect the ‘spirit’ (Hayward 2014; Marshall and Drummond 2006) or ‘essence’ (Popham 2008) of AfL, given the need for teachers to consider each child as an individual. While some guidance is available, teachers could be given more support in the day-to-day planning of student learning through state-based initiatives such as the GIL.

Within schools, implementation of AfL for diverse students must go beyond generalised and generic principles to consideration in each specific context of the best approach to teaching and learning interaction, goal setting, and feedback for each child. Teachers need to consider whether the nature of assessment evidence and feedback are linguistically and culturally appropriate for each student. Teachers should implement AfL not only to scaffold student discipline learning but also to scaffold their induction into learning and classroom interaction discourses as appropriate.

Finally, but not least, following AfL principles, more investigation is needed on how diverse students can be successfully engaged in sensitive ways in responsibility for their own learning and the learning of peers, through self- and peer assessment. Technology such as tablets may be the critical new tools that enable these students to develop agency in their own learning and documentation of learning progress.

## References

- Abedi, J. (2010). Research and recommendations for formative assessment with English language learners. In H. Andrade & C. Cizek (Eds.), *Handbook of formative assessment* (pp. 181–197). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Albright, J., Knezevic, L., & Farrell, L. (2013). Everyday practices of teachers of English: A survey at the outset of national curriculum implementation. *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*, 36(2), 111–120.
- Assessment Reform Group. (1999). Assessment for learning: Beyond the black box. Retrieved from [http://assessmentreformgroup.files.wordpress.com/2012/01/beyond\\_blackbox.pdf](http://assessmentreformgroup.files.wordpress.com/2012/01/beyond_blackbox.pdf). Accessed April 11, 2016.
- Assessment Reform Group. (2002). *Assessment is for learning: 10 principles. Research-based principles to guide classroom practice*. [http://assessmentreformgroup.files.wordpress.com/2012/01/10principles\\_english.pdf](http://assessmentreformgroup.files.wordpress.com/2012/01/10principles_english.pdf). Accessed July 20, 2015.
- Attorney-General. (2005). *Disability standards for education 2005*. Canberra, Australia: AG. <http://www.comlaw.gov.au/Details/F2005L00767>. Accessed July 20, 2015.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2015). 4221.0—*Schools, Australia, 2014*. <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4221.0>. Accessed July 20, 2015.
- Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority. (2012). *The shape of the Australian Curriculum* (Version 4.0). [http://www.acara.edu.au/verve/\\_resources/the\\_shape\\_of\\_the\\_australian\\_curriculum\\_v4.pdf](http://www.acara.edu.au/verve/_resources/the_shape_of_the_australian_curriculum_v4.pdf). Accessed July 20, 2015.
- Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority. (2013a). *An integrated approach* [Video]. <http://www.acara.edu.au/illustrations/IOPL00006/>. Accessed July 20, 2015.

- Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority. (2013b). *Student diversity*. <http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/StudentDiversity/Pdf/StudentDiversity>. Accessed July 20, 2015.
- Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority. (2013c). *Uluru: A landform in a landscape* [Video]. <http://www.acara.edu.au/illustrations/IOPL00001/>. Accessed July 20, 2015.
- Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority. (2015). *Personalised learning*. <http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/studentdiversity/eal-d-personalised-learning>. Accessed July 20, 2015.
- Baird, J., Hopfenbeck, T., Newton, P., Stobart, G., & Steen-Utheim, A. (2014). *State of the field review: Assessment and learning*. Report for the Norwegian Knowledge Centre for Education. <http://taloe.up.pt/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/FINALMASTER2July14Bairdeta2014AssessmentandLearning.pdf>. Accessed July 20, 2015.
- Bennett, R. (2011). Formative assessment: A critical review. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy and Practice*, 18, 5–25. doi:10.1080/0969594X.2010.513678
- Black, P., & Wiliam, D. (1998). Assessment and classroom learning. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy and Practice*, 5, 7–74. doi:10.1080/0969595980050102
- Black, P., & Wiliam, D. (2009). Developing the theory of formative assessment. *Educational Assessment, Evaluation and Accountability*, 21, 5–31. doi:10.1007/s11092-008-9068-5
- Board of Studies (New South Wales). (2015). *Assessment for learning in the years 7–10 syllabuses*. <http://arc.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/go/sc/afll/>. Accessed July 20, 2015.
- Bourke, R., Mentis, M., & Todd, L. (2011). Visibly learning: Teachers' assessment practices for students with high and very high needs. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 15, 405–419. doi:10.1080/13603110903038488
- Carrington, S., & MacArthur, J. (Eds.). (2012). *Teaching in inclusive school communities*. Milton, Qld, Australia: Wiley.
- Colbert, P., & Cumming, J. (2014). Enabling all students to learn through assessment: A case study of equitable outcomes through the use of criteria and standards. In C. Wyatt-Smith & V. Klenowski (Eds.), *Designing assessment for quality learning* (pp. 207–227). Dordrecht: Springer.
- Crooks, T. (1988). The impact of classroom evaluation practices on students. *Review of Educational Research*, 58, 438–481.
- Cumming, J. (2012). *Valuing students with impairments: International comparisons of practice in educational accountability*. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Cumming, J. J., & Mawdsley, R. (2012). The nationalisation of education in Australia and annexation of private schooling to public goals. *International Journal of Law and Education*, 17(2), 7–31.
- Department of Education and Communities. (2011). *Students with language backgrounds other than English in NSW public schools: 2011*. [https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/media/downloads/about-us/statistics-and-research/key-statistics-information/lbote\\_students.pdf](https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/media/downloads/about-us/statistics-and-research/key-statistics-information/lbote_students.pdf). Accessed July 20, 2015.
- Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. (2013). Assessment advice. Victoria: DEECD. <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/support/Pages/advice.aspx>. Accessed July 20, 2015.
- European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education. (2009). *Assessment for learning and pupils with special educational needs*. [https://www.european-agency.org/sites/default/files/assessment-for-learning-and-pupils-with-special-educational-needs\\_assessment\\_for\\_learning\\_en.pdf](https://www.european-agency.org/sites/default/files/assessment-for-learning-and-pupils-with-special-educational-needs_assessment_for_learning_en.pdf). Accessed July 20, 2015.
- Fuchs, L., & Fuchs, D. (1986). Effects of systematic formative evaluation: A meta-analysis. *Exceptional Children*, 53, 199–208. doi:10.1177/001440298605300301
- Fuchs, L., Fuchs, D., Karns, K., Hamlett, C., Kataroff, M., & Dutka, S. (1997). Effects of task-focused goals on low-achieving students with and without learning disabilities. *American Educational Research Journal*, 34, 513–543. doi:10.3102/00028312034003513

- Hattie, J., & Timperley, H. (2007). The power of feedback. *Review of Educational Research*, 77, 81–112. doi:[10.3102/003465430298487](https://doi.org/10.3102/003465430298487)
- Hayward, L. (2014). Assessment for learning and the journey towards inclusion. In L. Florian (Ed.), *SAGE handbook of special education* (2nd ed., pp. 523–535). London, UK: SAGE.
- Hayward, L., & Spencer, E. (2014). Assessment for learning. In M. Carroll & M. McCulloch (Eds.), *Understanding teaching and learning in primary education* (pp. 162–175). London, UK: SAGE.
- Klenowski, V. (2014). Towards fairer assessment. *The Australian Educational Researcher*, 41, 445–470. doi:[10.1007/s13384-013-0132-x](https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-013-0132-x)
- Marshall, B., & Drummond, M. (2006). How teachers engage with assessment for learning: Lessons from the classroom. *Research Papers in Education*, 21, 133–149. doi:[10.1080/02671520600615638](https://doi.org/10.1080/02671520600615638)
- Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs. (2008). *Melbourne declaration on educational goals for young Australians*. [http://www.curriculum.edu.au/verve/\\_resources/National\\_Declaration\\_on\\_the\\_Educational\\_Goals\\_for\\_Young\\_Australians.pdf](http://www.curriculum.edu.au/verve/_resources/National_Declaration_on_the_Educational_Goals_for_Young_Australians.pdf). Accessed July 20, 2015.
- Perrenoud, P. (1998). From formative evaluation to a controlled regulation of learning processes. Towards a wider conceptual field. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy and Practice*, 5, 85–102. doi:[10.1080/0969595980050105](https://doi.org/10.1080/0969595980050105)
- Pitoniak, M., & Royer, J. (2001). Testing accommodations for examinees with disabilities: A review of psychometric, legal, and social issues. *Review of Educational Research*, 71, 53–104. doi:[10.3102/00346543071001053](https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543071001053)
- Popham, J. (2008). *Transformative assessment*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Powell, S., & Jordan, R. (2012). *Autism and learning: A guide to good practice* (2nd ed.). London, UK: Routledge.
- PricewaterhouseCoopers. (2013). *2012 trial of the nationally consistent collection of data on school students with disability* (Final report). Sydney, NSW: PricewaterhouseCoopers. [https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/attachment\\_13-2012\\_trial\\_of\\_the\\_nationally\\_consistent\\_collection\\_of\\_data\\_on\\_school\\_students\\_with\\_disability.pdf](https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/attachment_13-2012_trial_of_the_nationally_consistent_collection_of_data_on_school_students_with_disability.pdf). Accessed July 20, 2015.
- Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority. (2014). *Guide for individual learning*. Brisbane, QLD: QCAA. [https://www.qcaa.qld.edu.au/downloads/senior/qcia\\_guidel\\_ind\\_learn.pdf](https://www.qcaa.qld.edu.au/downloads/senior/qcia_guidel_ind_learn.pdf). Accessed July 20, 2015.
- Ramaprasad, A. (1983). On the definition of feedback. *Behavioral Science*, 28, 4–13. doi:[10.1002/bs.3830280103](https://doi.org/10.1002/bs.3830280103)
- Ravet, J. (2013). Delving deeper into the black box: Formative assessment, inclusion and learners on the autism spectrum. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 17, 948–964. doi:[10.1080/13603116.2012.719552](https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2012.719552)
- Sadler, D. R. (1989). Formative assessment and the design of instructional systems. *Instructional Science*, 18, 119–144. doi:[10.1007/BF00117714](https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00117714)
- Shaddock, A., Smyth King, B., & Giorcelli, L. (2007). *A project to improve the learning outcomes of students with disabilities in the early, middle and post compulsory years of schooling*. Canberra, ACT: Australian Government.
- Shute, V. (2008). Focus on formative feedback. *Review of Educational Research*, 78, 153–189. doi:[10.3102/0034654307313795](https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654307313795)
- Trumbull, E., & Lash, A. (2013). *Understanding formative assessment: Insights from learning theory and measurement theory*. San Francisco, CA: WestEd. [http://www.wested.org/online\\_pubs/resource1307.pdf](http://www.wested.org/online_pubs/resource1307.pdf). Accessed July 20, 2015.
- Van der Kleij, F. M., Feskens, R. C. W., & Eggen, T. J. H. M. (2015). Effects of feedback in a computer-based learning environment on students' learning outcomes: A meta-analysis. *Review of Educational Research*, 85, 475–511. doi:[10.3102/0034654314564881](https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654314564881)

- William, D., & Thompson, M. (2007). Integrating assessment with instruction: What will it take to make it work? In C. A. Dwyer (Ed.), *The future of assessment: Shaping teaching learning* (pp. 53–82). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Wyatt-Smith, C., Elkins, J., Colbert, P., Gunn, S., & Muspratt, A. (2007). *Changing the nature of support provision-students with learning difficulties: Interventions in literacy and numeracy project (InLaN)* (Vols. 1–4). Canberra, ACT: Department of Education, Science and Training, Australian Government.