

# **FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT: AN APPROACH TO FOSTER SELF MANAGEMENT AND EMPOWER LEARNERS**

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## **Abstract**

Formative assessment is a fundamental teaching strategy used to assist VET learners. Good practice includes providing effective feedback that engages learners, adjusting teaching informed by the assessment results, and recognising the influence of assessment on learners' motivation and self-esteem. Constructive feedback to learners needs to stimulate thinking, identify what has been done well and what needs improvement. (Nicol & Macfarlane- Dick, 2006) Formative assessment commonly entails verbal feedback about good practice and what the learner is not doing well. Invariably, this tends to be a one way process (teacher to learner). This strategy relies on learners' listening skills, ability to remember what the teacher said and valuing it enough to act on it, such learners do not necessarily have a sense of ownership or empowerment in the process (Black & Wiliam, 1998). This and the tendency to easily forget the verbal feedback leads to little or no change, hence slow progress in achieving competency.

This paper presents findings from an action learning project with two teachers and six students enrolled in the Certificate II in Hairdressing who were completing the unit on communication. The project focussed on providing formative feedback that fostered self-management and empowered students to enhance competency in communication. Teachers and students worked in partnership to identify examples of good practices, which reflected competence, while also ascertaining areas for improvement. The benefits of this arrangement were noted by both students and teachers. As a result of timely discussions and written feedback students felt comfortable and improved their awareness, motivation and self-accountability. They took ownership and self-regulated their learning, while improving their communication with their clients, peers and teachers. They became more conscious of their own communication approaches during the formative assessment process. Teachers recognised the profound changes in the learners' self esteem and motivation.

## **Introduction**

Vocational education and training (VET) practitioners use formative assessment as a fundamental teaching strategy to assist learners. This makes assessment for learning (1) a formative assessment for the learners ; and (2) a significant pedagogical practice leading to continuous improvement . Assessment for learning benefits both learners and teachers. Black and Wiliam (1998) maintain that assessment as part of learning would involve

“... setting of clear goals, the choice, framing and articulation of appropriate learning tasks, the deployment of these with appropriate pedagogy to evoke feedback... and the

appropriate interpretation and use of that feedback to guide the learning trajectory of students” (p. 61).

While these strategies sound straightforward, their applications are influenced by complex social and cultural processes embedded within the learning contexts and environments. Therefore, how seriously these strategies are advanced by practising VET teachers would vary. Assessment for learning commonly entails verbal feedback about good practice and what the learner is not doing well (Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall and Wiliam, 2003), invariably making this a one way process (teacher to learner). As such, learners do not necessarily have a sense of ownership or empowerment in such a process. Typically, the process relies on learners’ listening skills, ability to remember what the teacher said and valuing it enough to act on it – if not, feedback leads to little or no change, hence slow progress in achieving competency. The common verbal approach to assessment for learning often has a negative impact, particularly on low-achieving students, who are led to believe that they lack “ability” and so are not able to learn (Black & Wiliam, 2004). These observations reinforce a need for shared role of both the teacher and learner in assessment for learning.

This paper will initially review literature to identify key strategies in Assessment for learning. The two strategies that will be implemented are: Feedback and self-assessment.

I will provide clear findings from the action learning project and case studies presented about how to enhance learner performance; improving understanding between trainers and learners on what they need to do to improve, and where they need to be – the desired goal i.e. competent performance (Black & Wiliam, 1998).

In conclusion this paper will provide insight into the strategies used by the teachers that fostered self-management and empowered students to engage in assessment for learning and improve their performance towards success.

### **Literature Review:**

Good practice includes providing effective feedback that engages learners, adjusting teaching informed by the assessment results, and recognising the influence of assessment on learners’ motivation and self-esteem (Black & Wiliam, 2003). Constructive feedback to learners needs to stimulate thinking, identify what has been done well and what needs improvement. Essentially, this approach needs to be the fundamental teaching strategy to assist VET learners.

Hazell-Yildirim and Lavender (2009) advocate that assessment for learning is not solely a tool to measure and judge but is to be used as effective pedagogy to ensure learning is taking place, and that learners are actively involved in assessment processes and decisions. Assessment for learning reflects good pedagogy where the teacher and learner liaise to highlight the strengths, limitations and potential of the learner; thereby taking the practice of student-centred learning to an entirely different plane.

Good practice serves a dual purpose of informing the teacher about the effectiveness of the pedagogical strategies to guide future instructional decisions, and helping students get a sense of the current state of their learning. The process facilitates motivation for

students to learn the content, note improvements and act on the information to learn more (Kaftan, Buck & Haack, 2006).

Without a doubt, dialogue plays a key role and a trusting relationship between the teacher and learner becomes critical. The process demonstrates application of Knowles' (1990) adult learning principle of respecting the learner's abilities and knowledge base. It allows learners to develop stages 7 and 8 of King and Kitchener's (2004) model of reflective thinking, and also develop critical thinking skills. Consequently, assessment for learning is considered an empowering process that encourages increasing levels of self-directed learning which prepares learners well for lifelong learning. Assessment for learning focuses on the gap between where the learners are in their learning, and where they need to be. It is based on the idea that learners will improve most if they understand:

- The competency to be achieved;
- Where they are in relation to the required level of performance; and
- How they can achieve the required level of performance.

Ecclestone (2005) alludes to a set of eight underpinning principles for diagnostic and formative feedback. First, assessment for learning should focus on the learner's 'potential ability, not on fixed traits of intelligence or personality' (p. 53). Second, learners need their own diagnostic skills to become independent and make self judgements. Third, learners need to be able to distinguish between what is high quality and poor quality performance. In this case teachers can assist by showing them good practice examples so that learners can internalise the criteria of the performance required to demonstrate competency. Fourth, learners need to be able to identify gaps in their performance and what is required to achieve competency at the required level. Fifth, meeting the gaps in performance requires wider engagement, not just 'closing the gap' by using effective feedback that clearly identifies how to improve.. Sixth, information from diagnosis needs to be translated into feedback that will actually make a difference to learners' performances. Seventh, proactive engagement with feedback is required from the students to help them fully understand how the feedback can be used to improve performance. Finally, learners need to act on the feedback to make improvements.

The diagnostic nature of assessment for learning collates information that is used to adapt teaching and learning to meet student needs (Boston, 2002). Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick, (2006) contend that improving learning through assessment is dependant on five deceptively simple factors which include:

- Providing effective feedback to students;
- Actively involving learners in their own learning;
- Adjusting teaching to take into account the results of assessment;
- Recognising the profound influence of assessment on learners' motivation and self-esteem (both crucial influences on learning); and
- Ensuring learners assess themselves and understand how to improve.

Essentially, the teacher and the student are both co-learners in that one learns how to adjust pedagogy to meet the needs of the individual student, and the other learns how to improve performance that reflects the appropriate competency level. When teachers know how students are progressing and where they are having trouble, they can use this information to make necessary instructional adjustments, such as reteaching, trying alternative instructional approaches, or offering more opportunities for practice (Black and Wiliam, 1998).

Recent research by Stowell (2009) and Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) indicates that using feedback that stimulates thinking, and identifies what has been done well and what still needs improvement gives the learners opportunities to be part of this learning process. These researchers also make the point that learners need to build knowledge of “good practice”. In such a model the learners are informed directly, giving them an overview of what competence looks like in the relevant industry. Involving students in formative feedback and evaluating every step of the assessment process, allows the students to “own” their learning experience and will empower them by giving them the ability to self correct, self reflect and eventually self manage their work performances (Hazell-Yildirim & Lavender, 2009).

Black and Wiliam undertook a literature review of 250 British and international studies on formative assessment practice in schools. When compared with other educational innovations, the implementation of well planned formative assessment strategies was the most significant single factor in improving student performance. This was validated by a range of more recent studies (Meisels et al. 2003, Rodriguez, 2004, OECD 2005). All of these studies have shown that significant quantifiable learning gains in students’ performance may be achieved by using formative assessment strategies.

The two strategies implemented in the action learning project were formative feedback and self-assessment.

### **The action learning project**

The action learning project “Assessment for Learning” was part of the professional development of two teachers in the hairdressing program. The action learning methodology began with a cyclic process of identifying the key issues with student learning, implementing assessment for learning strategies learned from the mentor (author) observing and evaluating changes, reflecting and discussing with the teaching team, implementing revised strategies.

#### *Data Collection*

Data were collected via the following techniques:

1. Five (5) researcher developed surveys –
  - (a) investigating students’ past experiences with assessment feedback, self-assessment and exposure to communication in the workplace;

- (b) student survey with Likert scale responses against the training package communication performance criteria;
- (c) teacher survey as per that for the students to identify the gaps between students' and teachers' perceptions of current communicative performance;
- (d) self-assessment survey to be used on an as-needs basis according to individual progression through the training day;
- (e) end-of-project survey to determine usefulness of the process for students' learning.

## 2. Researcher observation notes.

The initial surveys were given to the student in relation to “feedback” on their past experiences, whether they found it to be helpful or not, “self-assessment” and whether or not they used this method to help with their performance and “job history” to see what form of communication they had been exposed to. Secondly the students were asked to rate themselves between 1-5 on the Likert scale in what they thought was their current level of performance against the criteria in the unit of communication. The topics the communication unit covered were: client introduction, telephone manner, communication skills, personal presentation and work performance.

The teachers working with the students also used the same survey to give their view on their current level of performance. As researchers, the participating teachers recorded their observations of the students communicating in a simulated environment as well as students' responses to the formative assessment process as it unfolded.

The self - assessment tool was initially instigated by the teachers, however the shift in ownership happened about mid way through the program whereby the students were able to clearly identify the gaps in their level of ability and make suggestions as to how they could improve.

The action learning project was conducted over a 16 week period during semester 1 in 2009. Students attended the whole training program for two days each week for 20 weeks. It involved six students enrolled in the Certificate II in Hairdressing, completing the unit on communication. Communication is delivered in a holistic manner allowing us to observe the students in a variety of contexts. Teaching and learning for this project took place in a simulated environment at a regional TAFE Institute. The findings reported in this paper were derived from a case study report based on observations, and conversations with students and teachers.

### *Participants*

The students were chosen by the teacher and were considered as “High risk” in not completing the Certificate II program or commonly known as falling through the cracks. It just so happened that the students chosen were all between the ages of 16-18 and identified as “Gen Y” born between the year 1980-1999 (Talgan & Martin, 2001).

<b>Student gender:</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Status eg: Still at school or withdrawn from school</b>	<b>Communication level 1-5: 1- low, 5- high</b>
Male	17	Had attended other adult learning programs within the TAFE organisation and felt that he had been picked on and was not successful at completing.	1
Female	17	Still at school	2
Female	18	Finished school seeking employment	3
Female	16	Dropped out of school had not had a good experience in educational settings.	1
Female	16	Dropped out of school	1

### *Data analysis process*

With the small number of research participants, data analysis involved careful reading of all survey results as they were completed at different stages throughout the program. A feature of the ongoing analysis was the inclusion of students in discussing the survey findings. Teacher dialogue was ongoing throughout the project and formed the basis for key findings which are addressed in the next section.

The project began with sharing a common understanding of the purpose of assessment for learning among the teachers and students. This ensured that the process was not teacher-led, but a collaboration between them and their students. Discussions took place in a relaxed environment giving the students the information about the project and the assessment for learning strategies to be used, giving them an opportunity to ask questions and decide if they wanted to participate. After negotiations took place and an agreed understanding about the requirements of participation the action learning project began.

The students filled in the first two surveys as did the teacher who currently worked with the six students. On completion of the surveys a one on one discussion took place looking at both completed forms, discussing the gaps and engaging the student in an action plan to progress them forward towards success.

### **The action learning process**

The goal was to move the learners forward and this approach of intensely engaging and collaborating with them was considered successful as demonstrated by the following example –

Student X in the pilot group was asked to fill in a self assessment survey where he rated himself a high 5 against the element on personal presentation. The teacher rated this area a low 2. . He also rated himself quite high on the likert scale in other areas of communication for example his telephone manners and his active listening skills giving particular mention to accepting feedback provided. The interesting point to note was that student X had initially rated himself a low 1 and then changed it to a 3.. Student X came to class with quite a few body piercings, including a bar through his nose which was of particular concern because he touched and played with it often. He would then proceed to put his hands through the clients' hair. He was not conscious that he was playing with his nose bar, even less aware of the fact that it looked like he had been picking his nose. He had not thought of it from a workplace health and safety perspective nor on how the client would perceive it. He was oblivious to the image he communicated to the clients and his peers. His lack of understanding about what was “good practice” within the industry showed us that there was definitely a gap between where the learner was in his learning, and where he needed to be.

Teacher's feedback that identifies this type of unacceptable behaviour and seeking improvements would most likely be taken negatively by the student whereas if the student himself diagnosed the gap in performance, he would have ownership and respond accordingly. He needed to be shown how to read his behaviour, to foster self management and empower him towards success in all areas of communication – particularly initially in understanding the impact on others of his playing with the nose bar. A collaborative approach where the student and one of the teachers engaged in deep conversations resulted in effective, targeted, and timely formative feedback given verbally and in writing. The student came to the conclusion that perhaps it would be beneficial for all concerned not wear the nose ring during the days in the simulated salon and then he eventually decided not to wear it at all when he came to TAFE.

Student X displayed typical Generation Y characteristics reported by Talgan and Martin (2001). For instance, he generally struggled with face-face communication; showed inability to adequately relate to peers, clients and management; and was often unwilling to accept constructive feedback.

Student X in particular had not taken any previous feedback well and always saw it as a criticism. His tendency to focus negatively prevented him to improve. Towards the end of the project using the “session thoughts” document on reflection and the end of study

survey student X stated that he had become more accountable for his actions and said that it was “my responsibility to make the changes necessary. I am the one who can make the difference in my learning”.

In this way he had become independent and more self-regulated. He interpreted the feedback as a means to improve his learning, not a criticism or punishment. His interactions with his peers and willingness to accept his peers’ feedback also improved.

This was noted by his teacher during an interview at the end of the program. His learning experience not only became enjoyable to him, but also to his peers and teachers. His teacher stated that “student X” gained an understanding of what was acceptable practice in the hairdressing industry, this gave him motivation to want to achieve more and was evident in his behaviour and the way he conducted himself.

Normally quite shy and lacking self- esteem student X became quite confident in the way he related to his teachers, clients and peers. This was recorded on the teacher feedback forms student X placed in his practical logbook.; In this way, the approach used in this case study met the purposes of motivating students to learn, diagnose learning and evaluate teaching.

Similar to the above other students in the action learning project stated that they felt comfortable with our approach and they improved their awareness, motivation and self-accountability. According to the feedback given at the end of the program students that gained competence in this unit said the action learning project they were part of gave them a greater understanding of what was required of them giving them the motivation to want to succeed and take responsibility in their learning. It gave them clear direction every step of the way instead of just at the end. They agreed that the environment created allowed them to feel comfortable taking the fear of assessment out of the equation.

Student Y who had participated in the Certificate II program the year before and been deemed “not competent” stated after participation in the action learning project “ the project helped me a lot in improving my skills in communication and self presentation. This was a great experience to receive constructive feedback and be able to work towards a set goal and achieve that set goal”.

Overall, the approach used by teachers generated interactions between student- teacher which provided a catalyst for deepening understandings by both parties. The teachers’ focus was on learning to understand and the dialogue with their students facilitated this very well which was noted in the final reflections of the project. Moreover, the significance of a trusting relationship between the students and teachers was observed by all. Similar findings were noted by Kaftan, Buck and Haack (2006) in their study on *using formative assessment to individualise instructions and promote learning*.

Giving written and verbal feedback throughout the learning and assessment process and taking the time to communicate these with the students enabled them to generate their own solutions for improvement. The balance between each feedback method was equal and given often before, during and after the assessment task.



It was given more often and more time had been given to discuss the feedback and choose ways to implement change. In this way they were becoming more self-directed and independent. They actively sought and discussed feedback and were able to critically reflect on their performance and worked out strategies to improve. In actualising the feedback so that it translates into improvements in student learning, the teachers recognised the importance of their own communication styles to allow students to benefit from feedback and to foster self-esteem. This was explained by one teacher: “We have found that a percentage of our students in the Certificate II program in Hairdressing lacked self-esteem. We needed to be sensitive and constructive with our feedback recognising the emotional impact it had on moving the learner forward” (Teacher Interview 26/06/09).

The teachers were able to engage the students into thinking about their learning, empowering them to gradually develop their ability to do certain tasks without help. Their approach reflected Hamp-Lyons and Tavares’ (2008) suggestion that when the learners are part of the feedback at the pre-, during and post-feedback stage, i.e. involving the learners in planning, discussing, reflecting and deciding what is understood by the assessment for learning process will create opportunities for the learners. An atmosphere of trust and partnership allowed teachers to engage the learners to think about, talk about, ask and answer questions about and reflect on, their role and involvement in the formative assessment process. Using the surveys to gauge the learners’ views before, during and after helped effectively modify training and assessment strategies to suit the learner. The findings and discussions generated the changes in the way we approached our students. One teacher explained her experience as follows:

“It was common sense really – we just had forgotten or felt we didn’t have the time to work this way. It’s actually saving time if the feedback is effectively stimulating their thinking that moves the learners forward.”

Comments from both the students and the teachers have resulted in positive changes in the way we communicate with one another. Students said that by knowing what was required of them actually empowered them to look at what they were doing and put strategies in place that would improve their learning. Their comments support suggestions from researchers such as Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006), Leahy, Lyon and William (2005), Ecclestone (2005), Hamp-Lyons and Tavares (2008) and others.

The feedback throughout the course provided students with the opportunity to look at things differently and to try and implement the changes. It offered numerous opportunities to discuss the difficulties they were experiencing, in a comfortable and safe environment. This then gave everyone involved in the project a feeling of self-worth and confidence.

Teachers recognised the profound changes in the learners’ self esteem and motivation. They became more conscious of their own communication approaches during the formative assessment process and adapted the teaching and learning to meet their students’ needs. One of the teachers summed up the action learning project as follows:

The action learning project (assessment for learning) brought to the forefront something that had been done unconsciously into something that was now

conscious and could be applied to other learning areas. Applying the principles of Assessment for learning and adopting the formative feedback approach was successful and effective. It has enabled me to look at other principles that we could implement to improve and empower students' success such as sharing learning, questioning and peer assessment. Even though these principles were touched on during the project they were not the focus.

All the teachers in the action learning project agreed that the project has been a catalyst for further action and change. The five students that continued in the program all completed and were deemed competent. Two have already found work within the industry and will join the Cert III program in Ladies Hairdressing as an apprentice. The sixth student was unable to complete due to financial reasons.

### **Findings and discussion**

The project began with sharing a common understanding of the purpose of assessment for learning among the teachers and students. This ensured that the process was not teacher-led, but a collaboration between them and their students. Formative assessment given at regular intervals can move the learner forward in relation to the following critical aspects of communication: ability to communicate face-to-face; appropriate body language and speech; and the use of accepted social practices.

Students in the action learning project with the exception of one found it difficult to maintain eye contact with the clients in the simulated salon and were easily distracted which gave the client the impression that they were not that interested in them.

During the assessment for learning process the teachers gave formative feedback to students in both written and verbal forms and used the self-assessment tool to foster self-management and empower students to learn and enhance their competencies in communication. Especially for the group of students in the study, "good practices" and development of competencies in communication was recognized as critical by their teachers.

Talgar and Martin (2001) report that Generation Y generally struggle with face-to-face communication; show inability to relate to peers, clients and management; and have few skills in the area of resolving conflict. The teachers experienced a challenge in helping the students communicate in the ways that are standard practices in the hairdressing industry. For example the students found it difficult to ask questions and demonstrate active listening skills to determine client needs. They had no idea where to begin in relation to what questions to ask that would give them the information necessary to perform the next service. Once this was identified the students were given a range of basic standard questions as a starting point for extracting information that was useful.

Their language base was limited and often contained slang which again to maintain a level of professionalism within the hairdressing industry would need to be addressed.

These major findings reflect those of Leahy, Lyon and William's (2005) five broad strategies that also incorporate Ecclestone's (2005) principles for effective diagnostic and formative assessment. It is important to

1. Clarify and share learning intentions and criteria for success by holding discussions with the students at the beginning of the day looking at what had been achieved and what was still to be achieved, giving students the criteria of the unit in their language so they could see where they were at and what was required to achieve competence.
2. Engineer effective classroom discussions, questions and learning tasks by requiring students to operate in a simulated environment where questions and discussions were encouraged as part of the learning process at first these discussions, questions and learning tasks were set by the teacher eventually the students were able to develop their own learning tasks and questions according to their needs.
3. Provide feedback that moved the learners forward; this means that once the task had been completed both written and verbal feedback was recorded and then discussed with each of the students looking at strategies to implement to move them forward and adjust teaching methodology if necessary.
4. Activate students as the owners of their own learning: by involving the students in the process of self- reflection and assessment enabled them to take ownership with the students taking responsibility mid-way through the program for suggesting ways in which they could improve. This allowed them to find ways to help them achieve their goals at their pace in their way, and
5. Activate students as instructional resources for one another: by creating the environment for discussion the students were willing to share their experiences both good and bad and enabled them to see how achievable the task was.

The teachers in the study believe their approach of adopting more formalised formative feedback led to five immediate outcomes (Black & Wiliam, 1998):

1. Fostered self management and empowered student success.
2. Engaged teachers and students to be more effective in their teaching and learning experience.
3. Bridged the gap between what is intended and what is accomplished.
4. Helped students take control of their learning and become self-regulated.
5. Assisted teachers to adapt their teaching to meet the learner's needs

As suggested in the best practice assessment for learning model (Black & Wiliam, 1998) the teachers clearly explained and demonstrated competence in good communication in the Hairdressing industry. Students were given the communication criteria from the Hairdressing Training Package as the benchmark for competence. As part of the action learning project the students were able to work alongside the Hairdressing apprentices. Being able to observe their peers in a simulated salon that was closely aligned to Industry, allowed them to gain the knowledge and skills in a less threatening environment. As part of the project I was able to demonstrate behaviours that I had observed them doing during their learning. When they were able to watch themselves in

action and then observe what was standard Industry behaviours it became obvious to them what changes they needed to make.

These demonstrations were followed by individual and class discussions to ensure the students had a common understanding of the competence and criteria for assessment. Seeing it in black and white meant they no longer could ignore the facts but had to make some hard decisions especially when it concerned the dress code and personal presentation.

Instead of seeing it as a personal criticism they then recognised the need for change. The sharing of learning expectation was followed by questioning, feedback, self assessment and peer assessment. Students were encouraged to reflect on their performance and evaluate each step during assessment for learning. When peers were also engaged in the reflective dialogues during class discussions, there was evidence of critical thinking. This was not surprising, as Cooper (2000) also noted a similar finding in his study. In this way students were involved and engaged in written and verbal feedback allowing them to own their learning and complete the feedback loop.

The approach utilised Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick's (2006) suggestion to actively involve learners in their own learning and ensuring they assess themselves and understand how to improve. The impact of this formalised feedback in terms of how students received feedback (verbally or written), how much of it they retained, and how they responded was discussed by the teachers who participated in this study. The teachers realised how crucial feedback was, not just for the student but for them as well for example from the data analysis findings teachers discovered new ways to improve teaching and learning, and students could see and monitor progress, and experience success.

## **Conclusions**

The assessment for learning reflects good pedagogy and findings and discussions from this action learning project have been invaluable to all those involved. It's been about empowerment, growth and choice, giving freedom to the learners about how their assessment for learning is going to happen and with whom (Hamp-Lyons and Tavares, 2008).

Learners took ownership of their learning, became more self-regulated through the feedback process and were able to critically reflect on the task at hand. They made improvements in the way they communicated with their clients, peers and teachers. These developments demonstrate how the strategies used by the teachers fostered self management and empowered the students to engage in assessment for learning and improve their performance.

The profound influence of assessment for learning on the learners' self esteem and motivation and how it is crucial to the whole learning process was appreciated by teachers and enhanced their commitment to continue improving VET pedagogy. The assessment for learning project helped them identify how to better support their students more effectively and modify pedagogy to move them towards "best practice".

The teachers saw good practice in assessment as a continuous intermingling process – not a linear, stop—start approach.

The experiences from the project and the above listed outcomes highlight the significance of using appropriate assessment for learning strategies. The project adds further evidence to research substantiating that student learning can be enhanced through assessment for learning by using the strategies identified during this action learning project and supported by the literature (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Leahy, Lyon & William, 2005; Ecclestone, 2005; and Hamp-Lyons & Tavares, 2008).

Good practice included providing effective feedback that engages learners, adjusting teaching informed by the assessment results, and recognising the influence of assessment on learners' motivation and self-esteem. Constructive feedback to learners stimulated thinking, identified what has been done well and what needed improvement.

The success of this project reinforces the need for more widespread practice of these strategies to improve learning experiences and outcomes for VET learners across all courses. It revitalises the link between teaching, learning and assessment. It has increased teacher capability to undertake reflexive pedagogy within a critical action learning framework which can only enhance the VET sector. This means more students are successful at completing their program which in VET translates into revenue for the organisation. The benefits of engaging Assessment for Learning strategies are far reaching and further action learning projects are needed to support national collaboration to improve assessment practices in vocational education and training.

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