

# Assessment for Learning (AfL): An Assessment Method Easing University to Workplace Transition of the Early Childhood Preservice Teachers

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## Abstract

The transformative world driven by computer technology and globalization changes the nature of work. Thus, it is essential that preservice teachers need to be prepared for coping with the demands of the changing job market. The 21st-century skills highlight collaboration, communication, ICT literacy, critical thinking, problem solving, and social and cultural competencies. Assessment for learning (AfL) enhances development of teacher identity of preservice teachers which eases their transition from university to workplace. AfL can foster identity of early childhood preservice teachers because of two main reasons. Firstly, the preservice teachers need to have assessment literacy to help promote students' learning in school. Having experience AfL in a teacher training program creates understanding of preservice teachers concerning its approach which they can apply AfL strategies in their own early childhood classrooms. Secondly, AfL enhances preservice teachers to have self-regulation in monitoring, designing, and assessing their own learning performance supported by self-reflection. Successfully implementing AfL as a classroom practice greatly relies on decision making of instructors and preservice teachers, and other external factors such as state accountability testing and district policies.

**Keywords:** assessment for learning, university to workplace transition, early childhood preservice teachers

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## **Introduction**

Certainly, humans could never foresee the future with accuracy. However, at the present time where technologies enable bioengineering, direct brain-computer interfaces, and artificial intelligence (AI), the prediction of future is more difficult than ever before (Harari, 2018). OECD has had vision that in 2030, the world will undergo radical transformation which is quickened by technological changes from the fourth industrial revolution, globalization bringing the change in landscape and substantial global inequalities, and diversity through increase in mobility and population movements, (Rychen, 2016). The rapidly transformative world changes the nature of work. Computer technology leading to the automation of many jobs has greatly lowered routine tasks. Globalization invites people from around the world to compete for high-paying jobs and allows collaboration of workers living in different global regions (Jerald, 2009).

It is essential that today's students need to be prepared for coping with the demands of a global economy along with engaging in good citizenship and fully participating in a vibrant and civil society (Greenhill, 2010). The frameworks of 21st-century skills have been conceptualized by several international organizations and projects (Voogt & Roblin, 2012). What is common among these frameworks is the emphasis on collaboration, communication, ICT literacy, critical thinking, problem solving, and social and cultural competencies (Valtonen et al., 2021).

In order to render these skills to students, the teacher of the 21st century should have skills and competencies that support them to apply 21st century learner skills in their classroom activities such as lifelong learning, empathy, effective communication, problem solving, sample personality demonstration, and guidance (Tican & Deniz, 2019). Thai teacher of the 21st century is expected to be a leader of change who promotes learning that aligns with fast-changing social circumstance of the era. They need to have knowledge and expertise in education field along with English language and research skills. Also, they need to carry out their teaching profession ethically as a role model for students and society (Jitlung, 2019).

## **Teacher identity**

The impression of being a teacher is grounded on social interactions between the teacher and other members of teaching community such as students, parents, and teaching colleagues (Sutherland et al., 2010). Many novice teachers experience reality shock during their early years

of professional teaching such as time management, teaching workload, various duties in school, and maintaining relations with members in teaching community. Teachers in the early stage of their teaching career experience a higher teacher turnover rate than do mid-career teachers (Kim & Cho, 2014). Bridging the gap between practice and theory is the key to retain novice teachers in their profession and enhance their teaching quality (Holmqvist, 2019). Smooth transition from preservice teachers to become teachers can help reduce stress and increase confidence among preservice teachers while maintaining novice teachers in their profession (Klassen & Chiu, 2011).

Identity is dynamic and complex and defined by who someone is within a particular context - situation, time, or place (Kier & Lee, 2017). Identity is produced from the interplay between knowledge, identity, and interaction with the world and others. The notion of teacher identity engages an emotional, psychological, and social complexity. This is because identity is shaped by personal and contextual factors in the learning environment (Garza et al., 2016). Teacher identity in the 21st century needs to be contextual and discursive to cope with a global fast-changing nature (Collanus et al., 2012). Identity of preschool teachers are central to professional qualifications, knowledge, acceptance and approval from administrators and colleagues, and appreciation including value offered by the career (Scherr & Johnson, 2019). The construction of professional identity of preservice teachers majored in early childhood education relies on the way they remember and interpret classroom experiences as student teachers. During their training, they collect educational memory that influences their thinking; they develop lay theories about teachers and teaching and a very strong sense about what it means to be a teacher (Androusou & Tsafos, 2018).

Professional identity of Thai preservice teachers can be developed by different inputs. Practicum shapes Thai teacher identity of preservice teachers majored in English language in terms of emotional responses, practice of teaching, and symbolic entity which reminds the preservice teachers of becoming the teacher. Thai preservice teachers overcome challenges of their learning journey with psychological and technological supports from inside and outside classroom contexts (Prabjandee, 2019). The third space concept also helps form teaching identity of preservice teachers. The preservice teachers create their teaching styles from integrating and adapting theoretical and practical knowledge learned from lecturers in the university and cooperating teachers in schools. In this way, they tend to be able to deliver learning experiences that are suitable

for their students and classroom environment (Phompun et al., 2013). Cultural awareness is an important part of Thai preservice teachers as it enables them to recognize diversity of their students. Pedagogical activities are utilized to enhance culture awareness of preservice teachers on understanding Thai culture from different perspectives, accepting multiple perspectives, and valuing the attitudes and beliefs of others (Prapinwong, 2018).

### **Assessment and teacher identity**

Assessment plays an important role in evaluating the levels that preservice teachers learn and perform from these activities which result in forming their teacher identity (Eutsler & Curcio, 2019). Being assessor is a part of teacher identity. Preservice teachers in an early childhood education program need to develop an assessor identity along with teacher identity to fulfill their transition from preservice teachers (who are assessed) to teachers (who assess) (Gotch et al., 2021). Assessment for learning (AfL) offers a promising framework for promoting learning achievement of preservice teachers as it boosts engagement and motivation of learners (DeLuca & Volante, 2016).

Assessment relates to several decisions. This includes managing instruction, assessing student competence, placing students to levels of education programs, selecting students for education opportunity, certifying competence and so on (Milkre, 2010). Assessment is central to the learning experience of students beyond anything. The assessment determines what students consider essential, how they spend their time, and how they view themselves as students before graduation (Lombardi, 2008). Higher education institutions commonly adopt various types of assessment such as multiple-choice tests, projects, observation, interviews, and portfolios (Pereira et al., 2016).

The universal design of assessments in higher education fundamentally consists of fairness, validity, and reliability. Fairness covers all aspects of the assessment process, from considering the purpose of testing, building test items and instruments, and interpreting and using test scores. Validity means a virtue related to use of assessment rather than the assessment itself. The basic way to verify the validity of assessment is considering if an assessment result is suitable for its interpretation. Reliability is reflected as the exactness of assessments. For instance, a set of test needs to have consistency on different occasions over the same content domain (Harris, 2017).

Authentic assessment has been increasingly adopted in higher education in the first-world countries as its features allow students to engage in learning experiences that might be similar to professional practices in a working world which results in improvement of employment opportunity for students (Sokhanvar et al., 2021). Authentic assessment develops academic achievement and professional identity of students relying on constructive feedbacks given by lecturer and peers according to rubrics, and self-reflection of learner by applying their theoretical knowledge for analyzing situations in workplace setting. The assessment encourages learners to become self-regulated and increase their learning motivation (Ajjawi et al., 2020). Primary characteristics of authentic assessment found in authentic learning performance and practical use of knowledge which focuses on integration between theoretical and practical knowledge. It also emphasizes metacognitive, problem-solving, and decision-making skills. AfL is under an umbrella of authentic assessment (Villarroel et al., 2018).

### **Assessment for learning**

Assessment for Learning (AfL) is presently recognized as one of the most powerful strategies for promoting student learning (Gardner, 2012). AfL moves away from traditional assessment that adopts multiple-choice assessments. Traditional assessment assumes that knowledge universal meaning and views assessment as objective, value-free, and neutral. The purpose of traditional assessment is for documenting learning (Rosemartin, 2013).

AfL's theoretical framework is drawn upon constructivism and cognitive science. Constructivist views that knowledge is actively constructed by the learners from their own experiences and thus pays strong attention to social interaction, in particular instructor and learner. Cognitive science emphasizes metacognition as an important component of assessment. Metacognitive strategies include an awareness of what one is doing and the strategies one is employing to handle a task. Metacognitive skill demands self-regulation from learners. Learners need to have self-monitor, self-evaluate, and self-assess their learning during and after the learning process (Berry, 2008). AfL is reflected as assessment that supports learning (Laveault & Allal, 2016). AfL largely focuses on role of instructor in giving feedback to provide understanding of the gap between their current performance and the learning goals that they are aiming for. Eliciting

students' reflection on instructor feedback in student-instructor conversations helps students shape metacognitive knowledge on the effectiveness of their learning strategies (Baas et al., 2015).

AfL's features rest on collaboration between the instructor and students through sharing criteria of assignments, developing classroom dialogue and questioning, giving appropriate feedback, and peer- and self-assessments (Swaffield, 2011). The key principles of AfL include being a part of effective planning, centering on classroom practice, holding a key professional skill, having an emotional impact, affecting learner motivation, promoting commitment to learning goals and assessment criteria, encouraging self-assessment, and helping learners know how to improve their learning achievement (Sardareh & Mohd Saad, 2013).

There is a clear expectation that preservice teachers will be a "profession-ready" upon graduation. It is proper that a teacher training program prepares preservice teachers for robust engagement with the profession of teaching and learning, and assessment capacity (Charteris & Dargusch, 2018). AfL helps enhance identity of early childhood preservice teachers because of two main reasons. Firstly, the preservice teachers need to have assessment literacy to help promote students' learning in school. Having experience AfL in a teacher training program creates understanding of preservice teachers concerning its approach which they can apply AfL strategies in their own early childhood classrooms (Pang & Leng, 2011).

Secondly, AfL enhances learners to have self-regulation in monitoring, designing, and assessing their own learning performance supported by self-reflection (Chen & Bonner, 2020). Self-regulation enhances preservice teachers to use strategies to direct and control their concentration on academic tasks. Self-reflection involves with metacognition process. Self-reflection and metacognition process are constitutive of life-long learning which is central to effective teaching practice (Graham & Phelps, 2003). In educational practice, teachers with metacognitive skills ensure they can make teaching plans, monitor teaching behaviors, regulate teaching methods, evaluate teaching performance, and reflect teaching activities automatically (Jiang et al., 2016).

## **Implementing assessment for learning in preservice teacher's classroom**

Teachers' professional learning in AfL from novice-to-expert encompasses five developmental stages comprising learning, the letter, practicing, the letter, responding to the letter, adopting the spirit, and leading the spirit. Teachers in the first three stages keep on wrestling with the ideas of AfL. Only as teachers move toward the 'spirit' stage, they start to embrace with integrating AfL into their practices (DeLuca et al., 2019). The research base for AfL seems to be well established and accepted in various countries. Nevertheless, education policies appear to have not yet fully enacted AfL that will lead to a significant shift in teacher practice. The ongoing tensions between formative and summative forms of assessments continue to pose an important risk to the uptake of authentic and sustained AfL practices in educational systems (Birenbaum et al., 2015).

Effectively implementing AfL as a classroom practice greatly relies on decision making of instructors and preservice teachers. In addition, it depends on influences of external factors including state accountability testing, district policies, and parents (Oo et al., 2021). A collaborative approach between instructional leaders, assessment experts and teachers in co-planning teacher training programs enables overcoming barriers and challenges of integrating AfL into the programs through contextualized, sustained, and supported learning (DeLuca et al., 2016). The first pre-requisite for AfL to be implemented successfully in the classroom is not only involving teachers for their professional development, but rather to engage teacher educators in AfL professional development processes. There is the need that teacher educators to have time to engage and experience trial and error in developing their personal practices of AfL (Smith, 2011).

### **Summary**

The speedy transformative world reshapes the nature of work. Computer technology has greatly lowered routine tasks. Globalization invites people from around the world to compete for high-paying jobs and allows collaboration of workers living in different global regions. Thus, it is essential that today's students need to be prepared for coping with the demands of a global economy along with engaging in good citizenship and fully participating in a vibrant and civil society. The 21st-century skills emphasize on collaboration, communication, ICT literacy, critical thinking, problem solving, and social and cultural competencies. Professional identity of Thai

preservice teachers in the 21st century can be developed by implementing assessment for learning (AfL). AfL promotes learning achievement of preservice teachers as it boosts engagement and motivation of learners. AfL enhances integration between theoretical and practical knowledge. It also emphasizes metacognitive, problem-solving, and decision-making skills. AfL develops identity of early childhood preservice teachers because of two main reasons. Firstly, the preservice teachers need to have assessment literacy to help promote students' learning in school. Secondly, AfL enhances learners to have self-regulation in monitoring, designing, and assessing their own learning performance supported by self-reflection. Effectively implementing AfL as a classroom practice greatly relies on decision making of instructors and preservice teachers, and other external factors such as state accountability testing, and district policies.



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