



Assessment for Learning is one of the Department for Education's main focus areas for schools to take forward in the drive to raise standards. New and innovative ways of tackling assessment are key to motivating pupils to succeed and empowering them to develop their capacity for self-assessment.

By **Frank Bruce**

Assessment for Learning in Action with LogoVisual Thinking:

Making Students the Examiners

Current Practice

Assessment has moved on a lot since the old end of term reports. Pupils used to be assessed with percentage marks in each subject totalled on a report card for parents. One of the biggest developments was the introduction of levels. Schools were at first slow to adapt these to everyday teaching, but with the need to give clear guidance to pupils about what level they are working at and how to improve further, these have become increasingly important. Many schools now report working at levels, sub-dividing levels into higher, middle and lower bands, and are more comfortable with their use in classroom teaching. The time has now come to move this forward.

The opportunity of Assessment for Learning

Most teachers mark written work with a level and give some degree of summative feedback about its qualities. Targets are added to form a plan as to how to reach the next level. So where does this fall

short? Recent work on 'Assessment for Learning' has highlighted the potential to develop the capacity of learners to assess their own work. This enables them to gain a much better working knowledge of the criteria by which their work will be assessed and a higher thinking capacity to formulate relevant, quality answers for themselves. This not only motivates but also taps into the higher cognitive skills characteristic of effective teaching and learning. In the following example, LogoVisual Thinking has been used to enhance pupils' ability to assess their work and provide a valuable tool for developing their capacity to reflect.

Assessment in Practice

The example is from a Year 9 English lesson, but the same principles can be applied to any key stage. This example uses guidance material from QCA in an innovative fashion. Text, criteria and sample answers to an English reading paper are taken from "Making it Real" and "Sample materials for key stage 3

English” updated June 2004, by QCA¹. The aim of this lesson is to evaluate sample answers for an English reading SATs paper about Dr Frankenstein’s dreams. Ideally, the class should have studied this previously, as there may not be enough time to focus on the subject matter and analyse the quality of answers in the same lesson. This will depend on the length of lesson and the ability of the class.

Beginning

The lesson may start by setting up the classroom for groups of approximately 4 pupils each around a Magboard. The first activity, is to randomly gather their own responses to this question. Note that the question (see table) is as much about use of language as the subject matter of this particular text. After pupils have gathered their ideas the first sample answer is distributed, one copy to each group.

Modelling the answers

Groups then need to carry out their first organising task in re-arranging their ideas, which they have written on the hexagon shapes and placed on their board. Ideas they find included in the sample answer should be arranged around it and those to be missed out put to the edge of the board. This will give the group a picture of the answer and how it can be improved. The process is then repeated with one or two further answers of increasing difficulty.

Ascribing levels

The use of criteria for assessing the levels of the answers can be used in a variety of different ways. It may be felt that this is too much to include in a first attempt. Alternatively, it might be more effective

Table 1 – Lesson Plan	
Key Question	In the whole text, how does the writer’s use of language show that Dr Frankenstein’s dreams have been shattered?
Introduction	Set up groups around Magboards and randomly gather possible answers to this question on to hexagon shapes. Share ideas, encouraging participation from every group, in a brief whole-class feedback session (mini plenary).
Analysis of answer 1	Place the answer in the centre of the board and align the group’s own ideas around it. What did it include? What is left out? What extra ideas could you gain? What important points have been omitted? Mini-feedback and sharing of good points.
Analysis of answers 2-3	Repeat process with the next 2 answers. (If groups are differentiated some groups may only complete answer 2, whereas others may work ahead).
Levelling of answers	Hand out levels criteria to groups and see if they can attach levels to each answer and give reasons why.
Conclusion	To sum up, focus on a target level dependant on the level the group is working at. If pupils are in mixed ability year 9 groups this might be level 5 or level 6. Class feedback: share ideas for the criteria for this level and set pointers for how to improve answers still further – particularly pupils’ own answers if possible.

to hand out the criteria for different levels of answer near the beginning of the lesson and make this much more the focus. In this example the levelling has been included after the pupils have evaluated the substance and quality of the answers in detail first. It provides an effective way to move the lesson on and link to the plenary, since it draws together the pupils’ ideas and crystallises them in a mark, very much along the lines of what a teacher would do when marking their work.

Scope for variation and extension

There are other ways in which LVT can be effectively used in tackling Assessment for Learning. This lesson lends itself to be repeated with pupils’ own work. The first run through establishes ground rules and principles and encourages pupils to become accustomed to the stages of thought development and the value of the process. They can then begin to handle the sensitive aspects of analysing their own work. The writer has found pupils to be very sensible about their own work, though often critical and a little embarrassed at first. It is certainly a different perspective on assessment and gives pupils a much clearer idea about how to set their own targets for improvement, which naturally follows on from their analyses. Systematic revision techniques can also be focused around LVT, using random gathering of ideas, organisation into a mind map and then re-organising in response to practice questions.

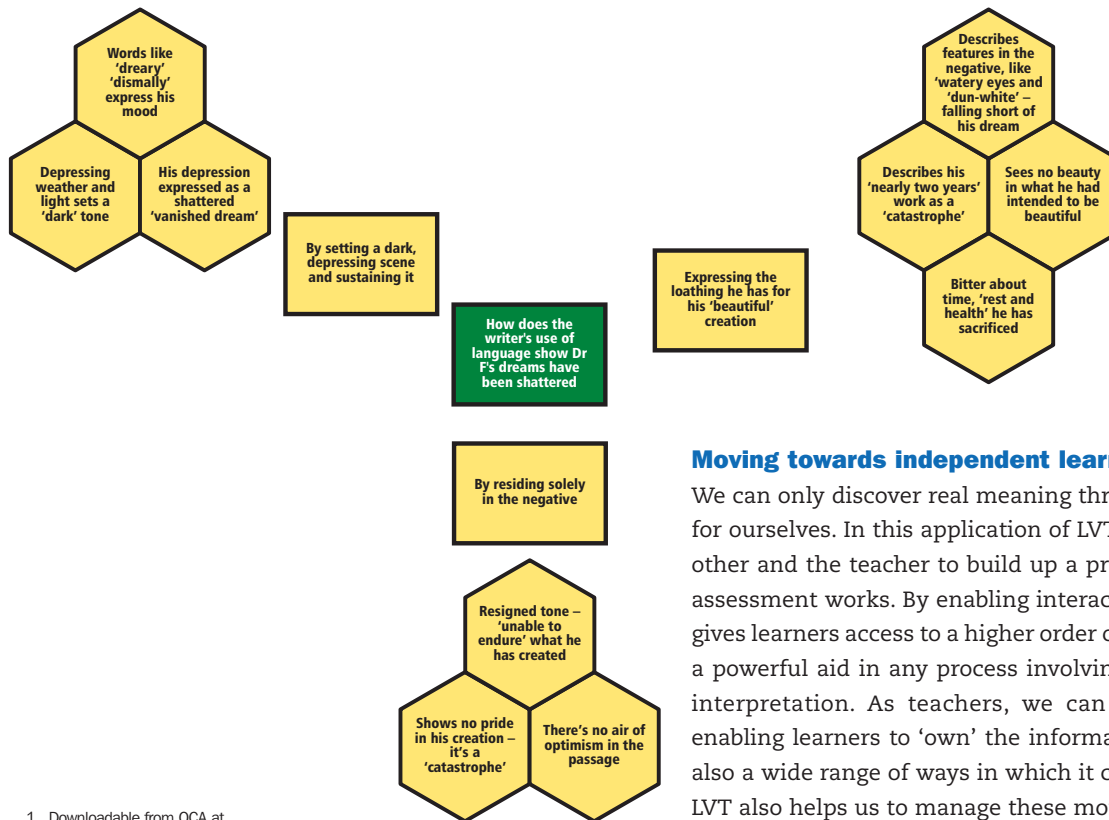
LogoVisual Thinking explained

LogoVisual Thinking (LVT) uses simple tools to enhance individual and collective thinking and meaning making:

- Logo** – articulating discrete units of meaning in words or icons
- Visual** – revealing and manipulating patterns and connections
- Thinking** – attaining new levels of understanding or perception

Methods have been developed that allow groups and individuals to work together on exercises that make their thinking visible and allow higher order thinking to be developed. Learners also benefit from the extensive discussion that results from the use of the tools.

See [TEX issue 5, Sept 2004](#) for full introductory article, and visit www.logovisual.com or call **Centre for Management Creativity (01729 8302322) for further information on LVT methods and tools.**



- Downloadable from QCA at www.qca.org.uk/downloads/ks3_en_making_it_real.pdf
www.qca.org.uk/downloads/ks3_en_changes.pdf
- Downloadable from the assessment reform group at www.assessment-reform-group.org.uk/CIE3.pdf

Moving towards independent learning

We can only discover real meaning through experience - by doing it for ourselves. In this application of LVT, learners are helped by each other and the teacher to build up a practical working sense of how assessment works. By enabling interactive displays of thinking, LVT gives learners access to a higher order of reflective thinking. It proves a powerful aid in any process involving reflection, assessment and interpretation. As teachers, we can move forward in not only enabling learners to 'own' the information we make accessible but also a wide range of ways in which it can be processed and applied. LVT also helps us to manage these more open-ended lessons.

Most teachers are familiar with and use assessment criteria for their own reference, but do not commonly use them in lesson activities. **TEX**



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Ways in which LVT applies to the key principles of AFL

The ten principles are taken from research based principles of assessment for learning to guide classroom practice, "Assessment for Learning," Assessment Reform Group, 2002²

- **Effective planning of teaching and learning** – as a structured lesson activity to develop awareness and understanding of goals and concrete criteria for improvement, LVT can be planned into the Scheme of Work. It can also provide a medium for effective planning itself - it's a medium for thinking at any level, not just for students!
- **Focus on how students learn** – LVT is very much focused on developing cognitive processes of how, rather than what students learn, thus developing their thinking skills.
- **Central to classroom practice** – LVT brings self-assessment into a manageable lesson plan format which can be repeated on a regular basis to build up the skills acquired.
- **A key professional skill** – this is a principle that should not be overlooked. Facilitating the levels of learning, reflection and student participation implicit in AFL represents a challenge to many teachers. Means and methods that achieve this, like (LVT) need confidence and teaching styles to support them.
- **Sensitive and constructive** – pupils learn in a non-threatening group situation whilst using LVT; expectations need to be set that honest judgements must be made, but work must not be derided.
- **Importance of learner motivation** – the visual focus of LVT tools provides a degree of motivation and makes what could be a difficult and off-putting task manageable and enjoyable. The clarity the process yields is itself a motivating factor.
- **Commitment to learning goals and shared understanding of the criteria by which they are assessed** – understanding the criteria is essential to 'Assessment for Learning', which can be formulated once answers have been looked at or shared from the start.
- **Constructive guidance about how to improve** – pupils see visually with LVT what ideas may be left out by their answers and form these into targets for improvement.
- **Develop capacity for self-assessment and reflection** – very much central to the processes here, which may be extended from sample answers to pupil's own work.
- **Recognise the full range of achievements of learners** – LVT encourages lateral thought; pupils randomly gather use of language as much as factual details and may include other qualities of good answers such as individual styles.