

## Formative assessment, a reflection.

In 2015 I had the chance to take part in a 2-weeks course on Formative Assessment in rural Costa Rica. Apart from visiting wonderful places, I met a community with people from different cultures, and learned a vast array of assessing tools and techniques. This is my reflection on that experience.

The opportunity was very rewarding. Not only did the course allow me to learn and acquire new skills, it also gave me the chance to meet and share with colleagues from several countries, with whom I exchanged thoughts, beliefs, techniques and experiences.

The most relevant things I learned in the **Formative Assessment for Competency Based Education** course, revolve around learning; this is because Assessment serves learning. Assessment is a way for teachers to be able to see how our work is being received or understood by our students, and it allows us to make the necessary changes, in order to improve their learning. Assessment is an **ongoing process**, that has a beginning and that can keep going on and on until we decide to stop it. I see it as a cycle: first you decide what you want to assess, then you gather and analyze the data, and finally you carry out plans and modifications, and to check if these plans or modifications are producing the effect we expect, we start all over again deciding what to assess.

The most important characteristic of assessment, apart from it being an ongoing process, is that it is *not used to prove, but to improve learning*. One should judge not only how much students know, but **the nature of their learning** as well. Assessing our students gives us a clear picture of what we have in our hands, and gives us a way to give a better, more informed, feedback. We all know the importance of feedback: If feedback is given in a timely manner, and it is of good quality, students will improve their performances. Not to mention how feedback help students realize that their work is being monitored, and his/her particular case is being considered and dealt with.

Another thing that I have always considered important, and that we reviewed on this course, is the importance of having a good environment within the classroom. Having good rapport with our students, and having a classroom with a comfortable atmosphere, will make learning easier. When students can participate without fear of being ridiculed or punished for their mistakes, they feel not only confident in their own capacities but they learn to value what they are being taught. In a peaceful and comfortable environment, motivation and mindfulness coexist, and when students learn something they can consider meaningful, they never forget it.

Assessment should be part of every step in learning. We must get rid of the idea that to assess is to assign grades. Assessment is so much than that! And it can be much more meaningful both for us and for our learners. We just have to give the first step and open our classrooms' doors to assessment. I did it, and I don't regret it. I know it may sound like I'm trying to sell you something here, but seriously, formative assessment is key, and once you get the handle of it, you will never leave it.