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Beyond the Gradebook: Weaving Assessment into a Seamless Learning Fabric.

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ABSTRACT
Educators are bedevilled with the challenge of effective assessment, and a persistent and continuous tension exists between its foundational purpose, which is to illuminate understanding for learners, gauge gaps and growth, and foster responsive teaching among others, and the external pressures of accountability, standardised testing, and high-stakes examinations. This article critically examines how the dichotomy between assessment for learning and assessment of learning creates pressure and conflicts in educators, leading to teacher burnout, student disengagement, and a focus on rote memorisation over deeper understanding. Drawing evidence from scholarly research, policy analysis, and firsthand classroom experience, the article argues that treating formative, diagnostic, and summative assessment as separate entities is pedagogically counterproductive for educators and learners; instead, a seamless, coherent integration of these assessments into the instructional cycle is necessary. The article demonstrates how diagnostic quickwrites, structured peer feedback, metacognitive self-assessment, and co-created rubrics can transform assessment from a source of anxiety and pressure for educators into a seamless developmental tool for intellectual growth. Furthermore, it addresses persistent barriers to assessment integration, including accountability overload, time constraints, cultural resistance, Technology and skill gaps, and large class sizes, and offers practical strategies for teachers to implement integrated assessment for effectiveness.
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INTRODUCTION

Teachers manage conflicts in classrooms around the world; a silent incompatibility of goals unfolds daily, bridging the gap between the educational essence and its operational forms. On one side of the coin lies the foundational purpose of assessment: to illuminate understanding, guide and gauge growth, deepen learning, and foster responsive, student-informed teaching practices. On the other side of the coin is the pressure of external accountability, including standardised tests, final grades, and high-stakes examinations that prioritise curriculum, tempo, and value. These two sides of the coin are the core challenges of modern education, which have caused persistent tension between assessment *for* learning and assessment *of* learning.

As articulated by notable scholars, Lamprianou & Athanasou (2009), Looney (2011), Ronan (2015), Lynch (2016), Erie Public Schools (2017), and Gustafsson (2024), assessment plays a multifaceted role in education, extending beyond the assignment of grades and the handing over of exam scripts to learners. In its fundamental purpose, it serves a **diagnostic function**, identifying learners' prior knowledge and learning gaps to gauge understanding and inform instruction and best practices. In addition, in its **formative role, it** provides ongoing feedback that lubricates and facilitates learning, enabling timely adjustments for both teachers and students. Furthermore, assessment serves a **summative purpose** by evaluating learners' cumulative achievement against standards and benchmarks for accountability and certification. Together, these roles create a continuous cycle of checks and balances that, when properly integrated, measure, guide, and gauge the learning process, ultimately enhancing it. These foster a dynamic, synergistic relationship between learner and teacher, creating a conducive learning environment and reducing conflicts between pressure and purpose. However, this idea has not been realised in practice, as teachers persistently face challenges over assessment integration for the greater good of the student and the conflicts of external pressure and core pedagogical purpose, which results in teachers concentrating on standardised exam preparation and consequently spurs students into rote memorisation at the expense of deeper learning.

This article argues that treating these purposes as a forced choice is pedagogically counterproductive and also a source of teacher burnout and student disengagement. It bred conflicts, impacted student learning, and classroom management. Drawing on scholarly research, policy analysis, and firsthand accounts from the front lines of a secondary school classroom, we explore how this tension manifests, from the teacher agonizing over test preparation at the expense of conceptual mastery to the systemic barriers entrenched in educational policy.

However, within this conflict lies a transformative mechanism with potential to transform learning and enhance the relationality of learners and teachers: the responsive weaving and integration of diagnostic, formative, and summative assessment into a coherent instructional cycle. This instructional cycle not only fosters growth and deep learning but also promotes inclusiveness, improves classroom management, and increases teachers' effectiveness in supporting learners' academic growth and developing pedagogical methods.

Through synthesis and analysis of the defining research, the study presents a pathway for transitioning from the traditional assessment dilemma to integration and best practices. The study further examined how an integrated assessment helps reduce teachers' anxiety about learners' performance, turning it into a tool for intellectual development, thereby empowering teachers to teach with clarity and students to own their learning journeys. This is not merely a theoretical ideal but a practical imperative for building educational systems that measure not just what students can recall, but what they truly understand.

The Assessment Dilemma: Purpose vs. Pressure

The Assessment Dilemma: Reconciling Purpose and Pressure

Assessment has posed many challenges for educators, including determining its purpose and importance. At its core, educational assessment faces a fundamental tension between its intended purpose, enhancing learning, and the external pressures often placed upon it, such as accountability and grading especially towards exam success and external bodies that conduct exam, thereby impacting and affecting the core purpose and relevance of assessment in the school (Lamprianou & Athanasou, 2009; Looney, 2011; Ronan, 2015; Lynch, 2016; Erie Public Schools, 2017; Gustafsson, 2024). This dilemma and challenges associated with the assessment manifest concretely in classrooms, where teachers report feeling significant pressure to prioritize test preparation ("I need to prepare them for the state test") over deeper understanding ("but I know they do not understand gentrification") (Black et al., 2010). Teachers often agonise over the anxiety and stress of helping learners develop a deeper understanding of concepts and ideas, while also prioritising test preparation, leading students to resort to rote memorisation and forfeiting the critical role of assessment and deeper understanding of learning. Educators commonly witness these, as many teachers lament management and policies that bedevil the effectiveness of deeper learning through assessment. While teaching, among other high school teachers, we witnessed these challenges among teachers/educators. These challenges, trying to balance social studies class with exams, and most times we teachers ended up depressed, stressed, and defeated, and less fulfilled as teachers, because the school management valued rote memorisation and teachers' inability to reconcile purpose with pressure. This struggle highlights the perceived dichotomy between *assessment for learning* (formative assessment, focused primarily on student growth and feedback) and *assessment of learning* (summative assessment, focused on accountability and final judgment). These differences, which play out in **purpose, timing, and role in the learning cycle, shape the purpose and essence of assessment.** However, research suggests this is a false choice, pointing instead to the transformative potential of integrating these approaches effectively (Black et al., 2010). As noted by the OECD (2013), for assessment to truly serve learning, teachers' practices must be meaningfully connected to overall learning goals and, crucially, incorporate students' perspectives in the learning process.

The consequences of unresolved tension between the purpose and pressure can be significant, leading to unintended outcomes like heightened student stress, anxiety in teachers, aggressive behaviour towards time management, and a shift towards rote memorization at the expense of genuine understanding, which impacts and affects students' performances and defeats the sole aim (Gustafsson, 2024). Hence, students end up in rote memorization, because the aim of creating deeper learning and understanding has been defeated. In addition, implementing assessments designed to increase learning faces substantial barriers, including persistent external pressures from standardised tests (State, Federal/Provincial), Exam bodies (WAEC, NECO), college entrance tests (JAMB), and international comparisons (such as PISA), which create an "accountability culture." Schools and teachers feel immense under pressure to "cover the curriculum within the given time" and improve test scores, hence teachers report having to "teach to the test" and race through material, leaving minimal room for the spontaneous pauses, checks for understanding, and instructional adjustments that true formative assessment requires (Williams-McBean, 2022; Lynch, 2016; Erie Public Schools, 2017), and inconsistencies in application across contexts in implementing formative assessment is highly variable and often ineffective, as there are no standardized method or means of the application, (Dayal, 2021). True formative assessment is a pedagogical skill that involves using questioning techniques, interpreting student responses in real time, and providing actionable feedback to help learners improve and deepen their understanding.

Unpacking the Assessment Ecosystem

1. Diagnostic: The Compass

Assessment is a complete pack that helps learners deepen their learning when used properly. The first in the cycle is the diagnostic assessment. Diagnostic assessment acts as the essential compass within the

educational ecosystem, providing a crucial pre-instructional map of students' existing knowledge, skills, strengths, weaknesses, and learning preferences (Erie, 2017; Lamprianou & Athanasou, 2009; Top Hat, nd). Diagnostic is the foundation. Its fundamental purpose is to identify learning gaps and gauge proficiency or comprehension levels before starting a new unit, thereby offering vital insights that inform future instruction (Top Hat, nd; Erie, 2017; Lamprianou & Athanasou, 2009). *Before treating topics like gentrification in my social studies class, it is vital to ensure that concepts in urbanisation and society are fully understood, re-examined, and that student knowledge is assessed.* This understanding of prior knowledge empowers educators to tailor teaching precisely to learners' needs, beginning at an appropriate starting point and providing necessary instruction and scaffolding within each student's Zone of Proximal Development (Connolly, 2008; Top Hat, nd; Erie, 2017). Typically, these assessments are low-stakes and non-graded; they enable teachers to plan more meaningful, efficient, and individualised learning experiences (Erie, 2017; Top Hat, nd) and reduce conflicts of interest over purpose and pressure, helping teachers understand learners' needs. Their importance and purpose lie in revealing specific needs of learners, such as a pre-writing task exposing that 60% of a class in social studies struggles with the concept of gentrification/civilization, allowing the teacher to devise targeted intervention to help the learners (Top Hat, nd; Erie, 2017; Lamprianou & Athanasou, 2009). These methods have proven invaluable in helping teachers and learners find common ground, where learners understand tutors and tutors understand learners' deficiencies, and an appropriate plan is developed to address them. While diagnostic assessment plays an invaluable role (Erie, 2017; Connolly, 2008), warns of a significant pitfall that may arise when diagnostic assessment is used in isolation; without acting on its findings to address the identified gaps, it risks becoming merely a "postmortem" analysis with no subsequent treatment, squandering its formative potential (Erie, 2017; Connolly, 2008). Hence, the beauty lies in the identified gap and utilizing it to help learners bridge the gap between the past and the present. This purposeful assessment to understand learners' gaps and develop adequate measures, pedagogy, and exercises to suit learners is diagnostic.

2. Formative: The Engine

The next step after diagnostic assessment is Formative assessment, which serves as the vital engine driving the instructional process, functioning as an ongoing, low-stakes practice embedded within teaching to monitor student learning in real-time and provide continuous feedback for adjustment (Ronan, 2015; Looney, 2011). Hence, this formative follows a cycle of check-and balance, Its core purpose is to fuel and support ongoing instructional refinement by recognizing student strengths, identifying specific knowledge or skill gaps, and determining the level of scaffolding required, thereby enabling educators to adapt their teaching methods and reflect on their practices (UB, n.d.; Ronan, 2015; Looney, 2011; Gustafsson, 2024; Gwenna, 2024). As noted by Gustafsson (2024) and Ronan (2015), Formative Assessment is crucial for helping tutors formulate and adopt appropriate pedagogy and measures to assist learners. Crucially, formative assessment establishes a dynamic connection between the learning process and individual student needs, facilitating mastery learning by enabling students to see precisely which areas require further development and allowing time for understanding to deepen before moving on. It helps teachers plan for goal attainment and improved learner performance by leveraging the gap and developing frameworks that learners can accommodate. In addition, the goal is to generate actionable feedback from learners that instructors can use to improve teaching and students can use to improve their learning, for better academic performance (CMU, n.d.; Gwenna, 2024). Erie, 2017; Connolly, 2008; Lamprianou & Athanasou, 2009 explained that formative assessment improves learners' understanding, saves time, ensures they are on track, and encourages self-reflection and ownership of their academic work. Some of the practical tools used in revealing the dynamic power of formative lies in practical tools like exit tickets, peer feedback, or draft reviews, which yield real-time insights, for instance, *in my social studies class, allowing social studies students to collaboratively discuss and debug analyses during a unit on gentrification help me gauge their understanding and track the level and modify pedagogical methods to adopt to help them reflect and be on track.* While the invaluable roles play by formative assessment are enormous in improving learners ability, and fast tracking, it is important to highlight that a significant pitfall may occur when formative tasks are disconnected from summative assessments or perceived as lacking clear purpose; students may then dismiss them as mere "busywork," undermining their value even though they provide essential diagnostic information to the educator about learning progress and errors (UB, n.d.; CMU, n.d.; Gwenna, 2024).

3. Summative: The Landmark

The landmark of all assessments is Summative. Summative assessment functions as the defining landmark within the educational journey, representing a formal method used by educators to evaluate a student's cumulative mastery of knowledge and skills at the culmination of a specific instructional period, such as a unit, module, or course—often carrying significant weight towards final grades (Lynch, 2016; UB, n.d.; CMU, n.d.; Gustafsson, 2024). Summative aims to examine and measure overall achievement of the learners in the course/module, confirm learning progress against established benchmarks (external exam bodies), and provide

an evaluative judgment of the knowledge students possess at a defined endpoint of the course/training, inherently connecting it to grading and certification (Lynch, 2016; Gustafsson, 2024). In addition, it supports learner accountability, provides a history of the student's achievement, Identifies Areas in need of further development and improvement, and motivates learners to review and retain content. These dire roles have attracted much attention to the relevance of gauging learners' performances. The most Common examples in the summative assessment include standardized exams (term exam, final projects, research papers, and capstone projects, which demonstrate their power in validating learning endpoints and reflecting the ultimate impact of instructional activities and goal attainment objectives/goals of the learning (Lynch, 2016; Gustafsson, 2024). Educators have widely criticised summative assessment for providing limited information on *how* students can progress further or specifically improve their performance. As Gustafsson (2024) notes, it becomes summative precisely when such developmental pathways are absent—a characteristic starkly evident in high-stakes international standardised tests designed solely for summative judgment. This high-stakes pressure constitutes its major pitfall, often distorting teaching practices towards "drill and kill" test preparation at the expense of deeper learning. Also, it focused on grades, was limited in capturing learners' potential, and most of the time does not reflect the real-world skills needed to navigate the industry and society effectively.

Why Integration Matters: The Research Imperative

Assessment plays an invaluable role in education globally, helping tutors and learners keep track, **establish a clear, shared understanding, synchronise expectations, and make adequate plans for the next steps**. This dire role reintensifies the importance of effective assessment for the duo. Many times, **teachers focus solely on student benefits in assessment, overlooking how it deepens their understanding of their learners, provides professional insight and development, and gives educators critical data about their class's comprehension, which can be used to inform policies that further develop curriculum and the educational system. In addition, assessment** paves the way for a responsive pedagogy that **accommodates diverse learners, saving time and reducing the frustration** that comes from forcing students into a one-size-fits-all understanding of the subject and rote memorisation. Student assessment has assumed an increasingly dominant role in education policy globally, reflecting its perceived importance in driving system accountability and improvement (Looney, 2011). Within this landscape, according to OECD (2005), formative assessment, defined as the frequent and interactive evaluation of student progress designed to identify learning needs and adapt teaching practices, stands out for its empirically validated impact. Also, Seminal research by Black and Wiliam (1998), echoed by later studies (Gustafsson, 2024; Ronan, 2015), further demonstrates that formative assessment methodologies yield some of the most substantial learning gains ever recorded in educational interventions. This dire and compelling evidence of the role of assessment underpins a long-standing ambition among educators and assessment specialists: the closer integration of formative and summative assessment systems. As Dylan (2000) further articulates, the vision is for data from external summative assessments (used for system monitoring) to meaningfully inform classroom teaching and learning, while simultaneously ensuring classroom-based assessments provide valuable evidence for decision-makers at school and system levels. Hence, these data form a **cohesive system in which assessment serves a dual purpose: external data becomes a tool for teachers, and classroom data becomes intelligence for the school system. In addition, this bridges the gap between practice and policy, informing further research and amendments to pedagogy.**

Integrating assessment plays an important role; however, significant tensions inevitably arise when assessments are required to serve multiple, often conflicting purposes, and some scholars believe a single system can adequately fulfil all needed functions. One of the consequences of maintaining strict separation, as Dylan (2000) warns, is the potential of excluding teachers from the summative assessment of their own students, instead completely relying on external agencies, especially bodies that conduct standard exams. This approach not only leads to undesirable consequences for teaching but is further worsened by empirical evidence showing that political constraints on summative assessment time result in a narrow focus that neglects important aspects of valued learning. This fragmentation threatens core educational goals, policies, and institutional capacity to make decisive decisions. Looney (2011) further warns that "When formative and summative assessments operate in isolation, both lose meaning, and affect the potential of creating a coherent image of learning, emphasising harmful effects. In addition, summative assessments penalise students if formative processes have not adequately diagnosed learning gaps or prepared them for the summative assessment. This negatively impacts learners by creating a fairness issue, as students are held accountable via high-stakes measures for gaps that were neither identified nor addressed during the learning journey. In turn, it portrays teachers as **underperformers incapable of helping students achieve better results, all stemming from poor academic results**. In addition, summative requirements limit teachers' ability to respond flexibly to student needs, thereby reducing teacher freedom, and in addition, repeating assessment tasks wastes instructional time (reducing system efficiency). It could cause conflicts for teachers between covering the required mandated curriculum and adequately preparing learners for the exam requirements (summative assessment).

Thus, achieving a seamless, integrated assessment system becomes imperative to address the learning gap, reduce pressure on purpose, and improve learners' assessment performance. Looney (2011) explained that a model where "formative processes feed summative judgments; summative data informs future formative action." (Bristol, n.d.) explained that such dire integration makes assessment meaningful for students, and tracking actionable feedback in the learning process while contributing to a comprehensive evaluation of achievement (Bristol, n.d.). Furthermore, integrating summative assessment into the pedagogical flow enhances its authenticity, moving beyond isolated high-stakes events, helps identify gaps, and gives teachers the flexibility to gauge learners' preparedness and performance. Moreover, this approach not only facilitates the accumulation of evidence suitable for both formative and summative purposes over time but also reduces the conflicts of purpose and pressure, reducing the detrimental practice of "teaching to the test" and fostering a holistic, responsive, and ultimately effective assessment culture. Based on the foregoing, it is crystal clear that integration of Assessments makes the assessment become part of the learning journey rather than disconnected "snapshots", help teachers create tasks that measure skill application and understanding over time, teachers can easily identify and address learning gaps as they emerge in their learners, innovate actionable data to adjust teaching strategies, pacing, and support for learners, and **Reduces high-stakes pressure.**

Case Study: The Integrated Classroom

Case Study: The Integrated Classroom—Gentrification as a Lens for Critical Assessment

To get the best from assessment, an integrated classroom assessment comprising the three makes classroom experience and gauging learners' understanding easy. While teaching the Grade 10 Social Studies unit, centred on the complex issue of urban gentrification and its roles in **society**, we demonstrate how formative and summative assessment can be integrated into learning to reframe evaluation as a critical, developmental process. By using the concept of gentrification, which involves changes in society, including displacement, cultural erasure, and economic transformation, the unit teaches students to analyse layered arguments about its impacts, weigh evidence, consider multiple perspectives, and give valid reasons for their perspectives. The assessment strategy mirrors this depth, transforming evaluation from mere measurement into a tool for learners' intellectual growth. It also helps learners to own their learning and be critical thinkers while acknowledging diversity and inclusion in the environment.

Diagnostic Stage: Unearthing Preconceptions: To gauge students' understanding and prior learning experiences regarding the topic, the unit begins with a diagnostic “quickwrite" or prompt for answers: simple questions like **"Who owns a neighbourhood?" What makes a community 'better' or 'worse'?"** These easy prompt questions served a threefold purpose. First, it helps surface students’ often-unexamined assumptions about progress, development, and belonging in society, as well as the topic about to be examined. Second, it directly informed the co-creation of a simple **criteria-based rubric** focused on social studies competencies and the topic: use of available historical and demographic evidence in the society/neighborhood, recognition of stakeholder perspectives like community members, elders, community leaders, long-term residents, new businesses, municipal planners, and identification and analysis of systemic forces like economics, policy, religion, and race.

Formative Development: Drafting and Peer Feedback: In the formative level, students engage in the research and drafting phase of gentrification. They develop a persuasive position essay arguing for or against specific municipal policies that could accelerate or mitigate gentrification in their immediate neighbourhood. A Structured peer feedback session with the teacher, utilising the shared rubric co-created before the commencement of the class, will spur students to engage critically with each other's evidence, opinions, and logic. Thirdly, help teachers gauge and assess learners' understanding, facilitate and foster mutual understanding between teachers and learners, and enhance critical thinking and knowledge assimilation. The feedback artefacts from the teacher and class discussion become a crucial piece of information in their **final portfolios**, documenting not just their own evolving understanding, but their capacity to contribute to a collective inquiry, a key social studies skill. Moreover, the shared experiences, learners' diverse opinions, and teachers' expertise provide a wealth of information to help learners grasp and understand diverse opinions and perspectives, thereby fostering diversity.

Revision and Metacognition: Internalising Standard: Immediately after the formative phase, revision is used to gauge learners' metacognition. The revision phase features targeted **metacognitive self-assessment of learners**. Here, learners are encouraged to compare their drafts to curated examples—including op-eds, historical accounts of neighbourhood change, and city council testimony—using the rubric as their guide, along with other relevant sources and archives. This process allows learners to internalize disciplinary standards and explicitly gauge and **document their own growth** in understanding the unit’s core question: *How do we evaluate "improvement" in a way that accounts for both economic metrics and human cost?* This documented growth will be formally recognized in the summative grade through significant weighting of **draft-to-final improvements**.

Summative Culmination: Coherence and Critical Synthesis: The summative assessment will be the final consummation of the class. The summative essay will be evaluated using the **same co-created rubric** employed throughout the unit, ensuring coherence, uniformity, and transparency. This intentional linkage accomplished two specific goals: It transformed the summative task from an isolated, high-stakes performance into a **celebration of documented, iterative progress.** Secondly, it modeled a critical social studies principle: that understanding complex issues requires sustained inquiry and the willingness to refine one's position based on evidence and dialogue—directly analogous to the ongoing, debated process of urban change itself.

Reframing Evaluation as Development: By using the topic of gentrification in social studies to critically reflect on the importance of integrating assessment, the unit did more than teach persuasive writing skills; it also framed learning itself as a process of **critical development rather than a disruptive replacement of learning**. Equitable urban planning seeks to foster inclusive growth, development, and policies that rekindle urban life, and this integrated assessment framework sought to cultivate and gauge students' understanding without displacing their initial voice or perspective. Students, therefore, perceived the final summative assessment (essay) not as an arbitrary judgment, but as the **culmination of their own iterative learning journey**, a demonstration of how their thinking had been developed, complexified, and substantiated through a structured, reflective process.

Barriers to Integration: The School Reality

Integration of assessment witnesses several challenges despite compelling evidence supporting the integration of formative and summative assessment; systemic and practical barriers persistently impede implementation in actual school environments. As Dylan (2000) posited, and subsequent researchers (Gustafsson, 2024; Ronan, 2015) acknowledge, most of these obstacles manifest across multiple dimensions, creating a gap between theoretical aspiration and classroom practice. These gaps bedevil teachers' ability to integrate these assessments effectively to maximise student performance. Among the challenges, first is the **accountability overload,** which prioritises easily quantifiable metrics: for example, high-stakes standardised testing regimes (Lynch, 2016) force schools to favour summative data for compliance, sidelining formative processes that lack immediate bureaucratic utility, and help teachers to gauge students' understanding and adopt pedagogical plans that tailor instructional plans to support student learning best. *Secondly*, teachers lack sufficient time to manage class and curriculum properly; pervasive **time** constraints stifle critical collaborative work; teachers operate with insufficient capacity for activities like rubric co-creation or moderated grading, practices essential for alignment but rendered impractical by instructional demands (Looney, 2011). *Thirdly*, some entrenched **cultural and traditional resistance** perpetuates traditional models, as exemplified by survey responses *such as "We have always had final exams worth 50%"* (Teacher Voice Project, 2023), reflecting institutional inertia and teachers' inability to adequately redefine the purpose of assessment. *Fourthly*, there are significant **skill gaps** that exist in the proper utilisation of integrated assessment for effective performance: many educators lack training in integration and use of assessment literacy fundamentals (Ronan, 2015), including rubric design, feedback efficacy, or metacognitive scaffolding techniques, which makes the integration and use a hard nut to crack. When teachers lack this capability, the requisite knowledge of assessment utilization, the conflicts of purpose, and the pressure come into play. Beyond these core challenges, other factors that bedevilled assessment integration include **structural constraints**, such as large class sizes that limit personalized feedback, overloaded curricula that leave no space for diagnostic cycles, and inadequate technology/resources for efficient data aggregation (Ninomiya, 2016). While teaching social studies classes at a rural school in Nigeria, with a class of over seventy (70) students, and three additional classes with over forty (40) students each. These large classrooms undermine effectiveness and the ability to access and properly utilise the integrated assessment as a teacher. Together, these barriers form a self-reinforcing ecosystem in the school environment where summative dominance persists not due to pedagogical validity, but because systemic pressures actively undermine the conditions necessary for integration. Another barrier is the policies and over-reliance on external examination bodies, for example, in Nigeria, West Africa, and some developing countries, where bodies like WAEC, JAMB, JUPEB, and NABTEB effectively control standards, often limiting pedagogical flexibility and innovation. Teachers end up in conflicts of pressure and purpose.

A Path Forward: Practical Strategies for Teachers

1 A Path Forward: Practical Strategies for Teachers

The challenges of integrating assessment can be cumbersome for teachers to adopt; however, Teachers can navigate these barriers through deliberate, scaffolded approaches that redefine traditional paradigms and make learning and classroom management more engaging and sustainable. First, the need to **reconceptualise summative assessment** is essential: the traditional method of treating final evaluations as isolated endpoints could be reconceptualised and innovated. Teachers/educators could weight grades to reflect demonstrated growth, for example, allocating 30% to improvement from diagnostic to final tasks, or implementing portfolio defences in which learners articulate their learning journey through curated artefacts and reflections (Ronan,

2015). This reduces pressure on the final summative assessment and helps learners gauge their learning and improve through checks and balances. Secondly, adopting a *backward-design mindset* ensures alignment: this involves co-creating summative rubrics with students at a unit's outset and establishes transparent expectations, while formative tasks, which are designed as intentional "stepping stones" toward those goals to be achieved (Lamprianou & Athanasou, 2009), provide incremental feedback loops, and give teachers the ability to understand learners and adopt methods for improvement.

Thirdly, the use of **strategic technology to** streamline integration: for example, platforms like Google Classroom or Seesaw can automate evidence aggregation, using formative checkpoints (e.g., quizzes, peer reviews) to populate summative portfolios while reducing teacher workload. While strategic technology offers innovation and assessment enhancement, it can be less effective in rural areas with unreliable power supply, poor networks, and a lack of funds to buy the technological gadgets to support it, and some teachers lack the skills to use the equipment. However, it is a necessary tool for integrating assessment to maximise best practices. Fourthly, **targeted advocacy** addresses systemic constraints: proposing dedicated PLC time for cross-teacher assessment moderation (Looney, 2011) builds collective capacity, while data-driven critiques of policies overemphasising high-stakes testing (Lynch, 2016) can catalyse institutional change.

It is important to note that integrating assessment need not begin with wholesale reform, which may be cumbersome and create conflicts between pressure and purpose for educators. Teachers and Educators concerned with the assessment dilemma could begin in a little way, within a single unit in a subject by first diagnosing prerequisite skills to establish a baseline (Erie, 2017); in addition, designing two to three formative tasks that from the unit that scaffold summative competencies; embedding student self-assessment against co-constructed rubrics (Ronan, 2015); and structuring final evaluations to celebrate growth and improvement visibly.

Looney (2011) emphasized that this incremental approach embodies the conviction that "the most powerful assessments dissolve the line between learning and judging." By grafting and weaving formative and summative assessment into a coherent, interconnected web, assessment becomes a dynamic tool and map for exploring and harnessing human potential, validating progress and mutual understanding, rather than a source of anxiety for teachers, educators, and even learners. The journey toward transformative assessment begins not with systemic permission, but with purposeful action in one classroom, one stitch at a time.

CONCLUSION

The pressure and conflicts faced by educators in reconciling assessment and purpose can be easily reconciled. This can be achieved through treating diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments as a cycle and seamless framework for teaching effectiveness and student learning. When teachers are pressured to choose between preparing learners for high-stakes examinations and fostering deeper understanding, both goals suffer, resulting in conflicts over purpose and pressure, which leads to rote memorisation, teacher burnout, anxiety, and disengaged learners.

However, integrating assessment into a coherent instructional cycle offers a transformative pathway for learners and educators. The benefits are enormous and play a dire role in learners' enrichment and gauging learning among others. The gentrification case study illustrates how diagnostic tools can establish baselines, formative processes can scaffold growth, and summative evaluations can celebrate documented progress rather than merely judge endpoints. This seamless and coherent weaving approach exemplifies a developmental journey of a connected cycle, empowering teachers to teach with clarity and students to own their learning. By seamlessly weaving diagnostic, formative, and summative assessment into an interconnected framework, we create educational systems that honour both the need for accountability and the deeper imperative of genuine understanding, measuring not merely what students can recall, but what they have truly become.

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