



Paper 9

Refocusing Postgraduate Medical Education: from the technical to the moral mode of practice. Chapter 11

Enriched informal assessment: diagnosing where learners are, thus enabling more
focused teaching.

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Enriched *informal* assessment: diagnosing where learners are, thus enabling more focused teaching

I recently asked hospital consultants on a PG Cert course to reconstruct a set of ideas that we had discussed together in detail in the previous teaching session. They were given the outline of a diagram to help them, but none of the detail. When we explored their completed attempts at this, the group went through a series of interesting emotions.

Firstly, they faced the fact that they had struggled to reconstruct the details and none had been totally successful. Then they complained that if only they had been told the night before that they were 'going to be tested', they would have learnt it by rote and been almost totally successful in their work! Clearly, they perceived all such exercises as a serious test — a memory test — *where success in the set task* (no matter its educational value) mattered most of all. They even saw it as a possible attempt to 'catch them out'.

It took them some time to see that the point of the exercise had been for us both (learners and teacher) to see just where they were in the complex journey from meeting a new idea in the first place, through having a grasp of some of it, followed by developing their own overall knowledge of it in their own words and then on to understanding it so that it related to their other ideas and they could re-create it for someone else. In this journey to understanding, the role of a test that required regurgitation of someone else's words would have been minor indeed, since no such memory test could possibly have clarified the quality of their understanding.

Their response to this was mainly because the concept of *informal assessment* as such (where the point is to establish where the learner is in understanding) was alien to them as not being central to PGME curricula. Yet such assessment is both an indispensable means for each learner to recognize where they are personally in grasping something new, and also an equally indispensable means for the teacher to identify a meeting point from which they can, together, successfully continue their educational journey.

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Introduction

Chapter eight in Part One provided a basis for *thinking* more deeply about assessment than many senior clinicians usually have time to do. It argued that rather than merely seeing assessment as a means of using 'given' national tools to measure the learner's achievement, thus treating it as separate from learning and teaching, there is need to use it to promote and motivate learning and to provide an important basis for planning the next learning and teaching experiences. This chapter therefore, seeks to consider and illustrate how *informal* assessment might be used to promote and improve the education of learning doctors. That is, it explores informal assessment from an educator's viewpoint, rather than from a more purely technical one. The next and final chapter (chapter 12), considers *formal* assessment from the same viewpoint. This looks at the national assessment requirements within each learner's curriculum,

which are part of the learners' entitlement and therefore must be properly attended to. It then shows how, with greater understanding of the principles of assessment, these assessment 'tools' can also be enriched as serious learning opportunities.

Both this chapter and the next see assessment as central, not just as an adjunct, to teaching and learning, and as impoverished when separated from them. Each chapter addresses the question: how, by drawing on their educational understanding, can PGME teachers use assessment *more educationally* to the benefit of learners and learning? Both chapters illustrate how without engaging in a root and branch revolution, current assessment processes can be evolved so as to become more educationally worthwhile.

This chapter, then, argues that teachers not only can and sometimes tacitly do, but actually explicitly should, as part of their moral practice, use informal assessments to promote learning. This can be achieved by creating active opportunities within their day-to-day teaching for individual learners to undertake tasks designed by their individual teacher in order to reveal their immediate learning needs, as highlighted by the particular context in which they work. This kind of learning activity is already common practice in PGME, but is clearly not always understood by either party as a key educational strategy and sometimes (as reported in the box at the front of this chapter), it is misread by learners as designed to catch them out! Using *informal assessment educationally* puts learning first and uses assessment as a part of an overall educational process. Such assessments (unlike those required within the national PGME curricula) are the province of and are under the control of individual teachers to construct and use as they see appropriate. But they only achieve their educational goal when the learner understands their purpose.

In exploring these issues, this chapter begins with a careful delineation of the differences between formative and summative assessment and how they relate to formal and informal assessment. Some key principles are then offered, enabling the teacher to introduce the learner to the notion of informal assessments and the design of small educational activities that will assess the learner's current understanding and pave the way for more enriched and appropriate day-to-day teaching.

Embedded in the presentation of these assessment principles is a practical indication of how they may be used to design informal motivating assessments that promote learning. Examples are then given of specific informal assessments, which show how the teacher can easily design their own in order to challenge the learner and extend their learning. The chapter will end with some comments on building quality into educational forms of informal assessment in the clinical setting.

Informal and formal assessments and how they relate to formative and summative assessments

Informal assessments

This section begins with a stark warning. Informal assessment of a learner can be and often is, casually formed on the basis of flimsy evidence and subsequently used in an undisciplined and anti-educational way. This occurs when a teacher allows impressionistic and unchecked interpretations of a learner's abilities, based on a one-off occasion, to cloud their judgements about the learner's overall potential and achievements. Of course, we cannot help forming impressions of colleagues and learners as we meet and work with them, but before we attach any significance to these, we should always seek to test them out for fairness and accuracy against concrete evidence over a period of time, just as clinicians would check out their clinical intuitions in respect of patients.

By contrast to this, informal assessment *used educationally*, is a natural part of good teaching. Such assessment processes provide information about learners' current understanding and help the teacher to reconsider their next plans or to reshape their next educational interactions with the learner. These processes might begin by looking over the learner's shoulder to see what they are writing or (in clinical practice) doing. But this needs to be done diagnostically in respect of learning and the learner, not only in respect of supervising their *clinical* practice. More carefully considered informal assessment activities need to be designed by a teacher so that, in a nurturing setting, the learner can be prompted to discover what they really understand and what they need more help with, and the teacher can understand how to proceed.

This kind of informal assessment activity can only be designed by a specific teacher for a given learner and should be positioned carefully within the planned learning event. Such a process, with its formative purpose, is not suitable to be part of a summative assessment. Thus, informal assessment is actually 'informal formative assessment', and is always 'off the formal record'. This means that the results are not *directly* recorded, though teachers may write about them for their learners' eyes only and they may also (along with many other kinds of evidence) use the results indirectly, to *inform* their judgement when writing the formal report on the learner's achievements during the course of the attachment.

Such informal assessments need to be created by the teacher who engages the learner in interesting activities to complete on their own, that will allow the learner enough opportunity to reveal, in their own way and their own order, the scope of their current understanding. As we saw in chapter ten above, teacher-directed questioning does not achieve this. In fact, informal assessment tasks are already easily available as part of the resources found in any clinical setting. Spotting the potential of these for informal assessment purposes, as they occur, is an important aspect of teaching. But informal assessments can also be invented or created by the teacher, and, since these are likely to be re-useable for other learners in that specialty, they can also be made robust (by, for example, lamination) and stored ready for future use.

Knowing and coming to understand

Informal assessment is a useful means of diagnosing where their learner is, in 'coming to understand' rather than merely being able to regurgitate a range of medical knowledge. This is because 'knowing' and 'understanding' are not one and the same thing, any more than 'knowing' and 'believing', or 'remembering' and 'understanding' are the same. In PGME, many if not most teachers make many un-informed and un-based assumptions about knowledge and knowing and how to acquire these, and don't even know they are making them! Further, 'knowing' itself is a complex concept because it can mean anything from having a mere acquaintance with the look or sound of something, to knowing it intimately and/or broadly. Thus 'coming to know' is also a more complex process than is usually recognized in PGME, where telling someone seems to be seen as sufficient to enable them to know.

The following is a list of misapprehensions about coming to know.

- ▶ If you tell someone something, then of course, they will know it.
- ▶ If they don't *then* know it, there is something wrong with them.
- ▶ You can 'give' someone your knowledge by transferring it to them.

- ▶ It is best to tell them *now in one session* everything they need to know (all that you know).
- ▶ They will thus come to know something — or even everything!
- ▶ This means that they will make a direct leap from ‘not knowing’ to ‘knowing’.
- ▶ Knowledge is absolute and unchanging, so once they know it, they will be unchallengeably knowledgeable about it.
- ▶ Knowledge lies in books and in ‘knowledgeable’ people, so you learn simply by reading and by being told.
- ▶ Once you know something, you will always know it, as long as you have a good memory.
- ▶ Knowing something is the same as understanding it and being able to use it.

By contrast to these statements, educators know that ‘coming to know something someone else knows’ is a complex process. It might begin by being alerted to some new knowledge through reading or listening. Such knowledge could merely be committed through repetition to rote memory. But this gives no evidence of the grasp of even the basic meaning of it, let alone having any real understanding of it, and certainly no evidence of being able to put it into use. Knowledge needs to be studied. This involves trying to understand it for example by talking – by means of putting it into one’s own words and checking that these words are a reasonable reconstruction of the original, and also by trying to put the given knowledge into practice. This often initially involves keeping the page open whilst working with the knowledge, and then later referring only to the knowledge ‘in one’s head’, whilst operationalizing it.

Being tested on new knowledge out of the blue, then, by being asked to regurgitate what has been learnt, is of little use in the early stages of meeting new knowledge (although it can alert the learner to just how much more they need to take in about something). Equally, in the later stages of understanding something, it is almost an insult to ask for its simple regurgitation. However, asking for it to be used on the spot in a problem-solving exercise can be very revealing. Equally, asking for a critique of that knowledge and how it relates to other known ideas or practices can also be a useful process in diagnosing the learner’s next needs. Thinking about ‘knowledge’ critically, and learning to distinguish the valuable and trustworthy from the persuasive but glib and unfounded, also takes practice and experience during which the learner may need a teacher’s help.

Thus, helping the learner to come to know something (to develop understanding) requires both learner and teacher to engage in a variety of processes that move the learner from merely knowing about something to gaining deep understanding of it and being able to use it and critique it. During this process, it is the learner and not the teacher who needs to do most talking, and, again, the teacher needs to listen very carefully to the learner. This is a complete reversal of the normal power relationships in PGME, and it takes practice for it to become a natural process. Teachers should thus be careful, especially whenever something unexpected happens, not revert to their old ‘default’ position of ‘teller’!

Formal assessment

By comparison to informal assessment, formal assessment is not personalized to a

learner to help them in struggling with the process of coming to understand. Rather, it looks at the product of learning. Formal assessment uses methods (referred to in the technical mode of practice as 'tools'), that have been pre-designed outside the teaching context and which are applied to all candidates — sometimes, but not always, at the same time. Its purpose is to gather apparently objective evidence about an individual's and a cohort's achievements, and to place these on record in order to judge them in the light of an agreed (but in reality arbitrary) 'national standard'. Such assessment can occur at set and discrete stages during an educational programme. The methods of formal assessment can be used both formatively (during) and summatively (at the end) of the teaching/learning process. But either way, the results of formal assessment are always 'on the record'.

Formal formative and summative assessment

Formal formative assessment, which uses standard national assessment during learning, is pre-designed for formal purposes in order to gain on-the-record evidence of the learner's ability at points along the learning pathway of the educational programme. Like all informal assessment, it should shape the subsequent teaching and learning and influence the demands to be made in future on that learner. But being pre-designed and therefore general, it picks up only how the individual learner relates to trends predicted by curriculum designers, and is not sensitive to the more detailed contextual needs of the individual learner. By capturing how a learner is progressing during the programme (at about the mid-point of the programme), formal formative assessment also will flag up the need for any remediation necessary for learners who are not making normal progress, in time for that remediation to occur before the end of the programme.

Summative assessment, by comparison, is always a 'final' judgement made at the end of a particular programme or stage of that programme, based on whether — at a given end-point — the work meets the published standard (the given end-goal at a given time), such that the learner has passed or completed satisfactorily that phase of education. (Standards, it should be remembered however, are in fact arbitrary notions!) Although summative assessment is treated as a formal process that creates 'final' formal evidence on the record, such 'final' assessment should never rest on a one-off process — even where it includes a final exam. The learner's end achievements are the result of progress over a period, and are also their starting point for the next stage.

Final assessment should rest upon transparent formal evidential perspectives and these should be collected along the way. Portfolios provide a useful means of presenting this evidence, but they are only robust if they are designed with that purpose in mind. In PGME, summative assessment happens at the end of each attachment and also at the end of each key stage of the curriculum (Foundation, Core and Specialty stages). Until the final completion of all this, the summative assessment from the previous stage *should* become part of the formative evidence for the start of the next stage, (though it seems in practice that it is not always explored in any detail by teachers at that next stage up). More about this will be found in the following chapter.

The inescapable significance of the assessor's judgement

It is vitally important to remember that all assessments rely somewhere along the line on the professional judgement of the teacher/assessor. There is no process that can totally rid assessment of subjectivity and even some form of bias. Education is not a science. Learning is neither a scientific nor an incremental process. An individual's learning does not conform to a pre-charted pathway but happens in fits and starts as they meet personal learning plateaux and unexpected race tracks. Thus the results of

assessment are at best temporary and educational judgement is an *inescapable* element of the assessment process, even where scripts are machine-marked (because judgement informs how the technology has been set up).

Further, since all learners are different, the stage they have reached at the key assessment points will not be entirely predictable, nor can it accurately predict later success or failure. Thus, no assessment can ever be totally objective and none can be totally accurate. Because of this, 'good assessment practice has to recognize the tentative nature of judgements made about ... achievements', (Murphy 2002: 179). This is why Broadfoot speaks of the 'myth of measurement' (Broadfoot 2002).

Good educational practice holds that whatever other purposes they serve, all assessments should seek to develop the learner's ability to self-assess and provide the teacher with important feedback on the quality of their own as well as the learner's work. This will help them tailor the next teaching they offer more specifically to the learner's immediate needs, but cannot be relied upon in the longer term.

Using informal assessment to study the learner and promote learning

Any system of assessment must be coherent and principled. The selection of such principles is of course also values-based. In the moral mode of educational practice, where the role of assessment is to promote learning, we need to think about assessment first and foremost in terms of what opportunities it offers to students to extend their learning and demonstrate their progress, as well as how that helps teachers understand where they begin so as to shape their next teaching. A number of important key principles follow from this that enable us to re-shape assessment so as to be educational for the learner.

The educational purposes of informal assessment

Defining and agreeing the *purposes* of assessment is a vital starting point in designing that assessment. Discussion between teachers and learners about the general purposes of informal assessment might serve to make more open and transparent any negative views learners might bring to the process, so that they can be addressed. Essentially, informal assessment is purely to help the learner and the teacher to engage together in more focused and better tailored educational interactions. It might also help highlight the merits and the educational point of the interactions between teacher and learner.

The following principles might be a useful guide for teachers designing informal assessments for their learners. They are not difficult either to understand or to use in designing creative activities for the learner. Such activities can occur to any teacher who thinks for a few minutes about how to engage the learner in thinking more deeply about what they have been taught. Indeed, for the advanced teacher, there can be pleasure in the creativity they are called upon to use in designing new activities. The order of the following principles is important.

1. The use of informal assessment needs to be negotiated and agreed by each teacher with their learner in principle at the start of the educational programme as a natural part of their educational interaction. (This can be part of the learning agreement.)
2. The learner should understand the nature of informal assessment as a teaching/learning strategy whose results are 'off the record'.

3. Its benefits to both the learner and the teacher need to be understood by both (though the learner may have to trust the teacher at the start that these will become clear).
4. Informal assessment needs to have a very clear educational purpose that is understood by teacher and learner.
5. The exact role it will play in any given teaching and learning session needs to be clear in the teacher's and the learner's mind.
6. The timing of the informal assessment within the teaching/learning session, should be considered carefully, in order to maximize both its benefits and the educational time teacher and learner spend together.
7. Informal assessment activities can occur as part of preparation for or follow-up to a teaching interaction with a learner, as well as during the session. This will depend on the above principles and also whether or not the teacher can benefit from being present to observe and listen to the learner during the informal assessment.
8. The teacher needs to review the choices available to someone designing or re-designing assessment *for educational purposes*, and where necessary to understand how to critique or defend their selection.

The choices available are illustrated by asking whether the assessment is:

- ▶ convergent or divergent: (narrowly focused or requiring creativity of the learner)
- ▶ summative or formative: (at the end of the learning or integral to it)
- ▶ quantitative or qualitative: (producing numbers, or using words, diagrams or pictures)
- ▶ objective or subjective: (some say there is no such thing as objectivity)
- ▶ written, oral, diagrammatic or some other creative form
- ▶ requiring a pre-set format, or one that the learner can choose.

The reasons for these choices are also important. For example: sometimes writing is used to show what has already been learnt, *but*, sometimes the learning is *in* (endemic to) the key processes of writing because new understanding comes as we redraft. It should be noted that inviting the learner to choose a medium can provide refreshing new perspectives.

These principles and questions are intended to help the teacher to match the nature of the assessment activity set to the educational purposes agreed between teacher and learner and then to create appropriate details as discussed below.

Informal assessment activities that challenge the learner to use and extend learning

Teachers in PGME have far more control over informal formative assessments than over the formal assessments found in 'Tools of the Trade'. Informal assessment is a process that enables the teacher to take local *educational* control of the curriculum

(as opposed to simply conforming to its technical demands).

Informal formative assessment can be designed by the teacher as a natural part of the teaching / learning process and can occur before and throughout the time that teaching and learning is happening. The supportive nature of the *learning context* in which formative assessment takes place is a critical element in engaging the learner in this process. Formative assessment which involves informing the teacher about what sense the learner is making of what they are offered — without making *or recording* any final judgements about this — allows teachers to make decisions and monitor their teaching based on learners' responses. The purpose of formative assessment is to lead to further learning. If it fails in this, then the intention was formative, but the process was not.

The fact that informal assessment is formative and off the record, releases teacher and learner from the tyranny of engaging in assessments that are about 'having to get it right'. It allows teacher to design educational activities that the learner need not regard as crucial to providing formal evidence of their progress, so that they can experiment, take risks, try out ideas and thus discover more about themselves as learners and what they know, understand, can do and achieve.

For the teacher this means the opportunity to see how the learner thinks, to distinguish what the learner actually understands from simply what they know, to see what sense they have made of learning components and whether they have properly seen how to inter-relate them and synthesize them. In short, informal assessment can crucially be used to explore not just what learners know and can do but whether and in what ways they can use what they have learnt. Well designed informal assessments can be fun, can be motivating, can enrich the relationship between teacher and learner (because they enable both to reveal themselves as people), and can provide teacher and learner with deeper insight about how best to proceed next in the educational adventure.

Some examples of the design of informal assessments

Any teacher can design informal assessment processes which are broadly formative in nature, to any chosen educational purpose for any individual learner. It is part of the process of engaging the learner actively. It involves creating activities for the learner to engage in that make visible and provide diagnostic information about the following:

- ▶ the learners' thinking, decision-making processes and judgement
- ▶ the depth of their understanding
- ▶ their use of knowledge and ability to synthesize it in practical situations
- ▶ their ability to be pro-active
- ▶ their ability to think ahead
- ▶ their ability to see the wider picture.

This should be regarded as part of the creative process of planning for facilitating learning, and requires the clinical supervisor to think like an educator (see above, chapter nine). Some of these informal assessments may be oral or on paper, where the evidence can be reviewed and easily used diagnostically. Some however, will be activities that relate to working in the clinical setting. Here the clinical supervisor

needs to be thinking both as clinician (ensuring the safety of patients) but also not forgetting to think as an educator, using the clinical event to diagnose the learners' abilities and educational needs.

Getting the learner to draw and talk about a diagram or use a given model to explain something newly learnt

In a range of contexts and for a range of different kinds of knowledge, it can be useful to ask a learner to construct and label a diagram to explain something they have learnt, or to use a given anatomical or other model, to explain something newly learnt. This is best done in front of the teacher at an appropriate time within a teaching session and with the learner talking as they draw or point to the model.

If a learner-generated diagram is a reproduction of something that the learner originally met as a diagram, this would be mere regurgitation or at best show where the learner is in a very new piece of knowledge. It may be better that the learner is asked to create a new diagram in order to elaborate what has been learnt, and to link it to what was known before, and/or also to show the relationship between things that have been newly learnt. The benefits here are that the learner uses the knowledge and the teacher can readily see and hear how far the learner understands something. This may need to occur early in a teaching session to direct the next stages or it may fulfil a reviewing or summarizing process near the end of a session.

Thus this process of the learner concocting and explaining a diagram can be convergent or divergent: summative or formative; and in either a teacher- or a learner-chosen format. It thus combines both the written and oral but in a form that is easy to produce 'off the cuff'. Here the only preparation required by the teacher is to make a simple decision about exactly what the task is and how, when and why to present the learner with that task.

Getting the learner to construct a self-assessment grid

In asking the learner to construct a self-assessment grid, the task may be to list what they can and cannot do, or what they can do but do not understand, and rate these in terms of the quality of their skills or knowledge. There are some assessment 'tools' like triggered assessment and the Intercollegiate Surgical Curriculum assessment processes that already set the parameters of such a grid, as the basis for conducting an assessment of a procedure. (See de Cossart and Fish 2005, chapter ten.) Thus this would be used at the start of an assessment session and lead into and act as a base line for the assessment. But a simple version could also be used in preparation for meeting with a supervisor about the learning agreement. So for some educational/assessment purposes, there would be a set format and for some, the learner might choose the format (and their very choice might be highly informative to the teacher).

Thus this process would usually be in preparation for or at the start of a teaching session. Such an assessment format tends to be technical and convergent, and would normally use figures (bands or percentages). Its educational benefits, beyond the normal diagnostic ones, would include the development of better self-assessment in the learner. Further, like the use of a diagram, it is quickly executed and requires no lengthy writing from the learner or reading from the teacher.

Starting a professional conversation in a novel way rather than following a mantra

The professional conversation, as explored above, is of itself a means of informal

assessment, simply because it requires the learner to play a key part in the talking and to contribute also to the content. The benefits of this can be made more striking if the learner is offered a starting point that is different from what is normally used.

For example, instead of starting a conversation about a patient by asking for the normal presentation from the learner, it is possible to start by asking: “what is your professional judgement about the treatment for this patient?” They can then be asked to work backwards to explore their thinking processes that brought them to this point. Alternatively the learner could be asked: “what will you do for the care of this patient?”

Again, because this is a conversation that can be held without preparation and at any point in a teaching session, it is easy to use. It does however require the teacher to listen very carefully not just to the clinical issues, but also to the educational needs of the learner as revealed in their responses. Without this there is a significant danger of agreeing tacitly to something inaccurate offered by the learner.

Using information on cards to prompt the learner to talk and make connections

Here there is need for the teacher to do some preparation, because they need to create a resource to check out the learner’s ability in some aspect of their attachment. But once made and laminated, such a resource can be used over and over again by learners as they come to that point of need within their attachment.

Thus the teacher may, for example, choose to make prompt cards or to cut up diagrams or invent cases that are bound to be needed at some point in the normal teaching process. These resources may be in written or diagrammatic form, but the learner can respond orally to them or even ‘play’ with the relationship between them, and talk about this. Again, of course, the teacher’s responsibility is to think diagnostically about the learner’s educational needs, rather than treating this as a test or a mere game.

These are merely four generalized examples that the teacher could call upon and by thinking creatively but briefly about them may introduce both a more motivating spirit into the teaching session and be able to learn more about the learner and their educational needs. Put another way, such resources are a key means of enabling the teacher to ‘study the learner’, which we said in chapter four is an important activity.

The quality and use of informal formative assessment

Both social and cultural factors and teaching / learning factors have a key impact on the quality and use of such informal formative assessment. Some *Social and cultural factors* support formative assessment, and some undermine it as follows.

- ▶ Learning can be seen as an individual or a collective (group) activity. Where it is a collective activity, formative assessment works well and the learner does not feel exposed. However, learners can hide their individual problems within a crowd.
- ▶ The way assessment is seen within the national level ‘centralized curriculum’ affects learners’ attitudes to formative assessment. These attitudes need to be discussed openly by teachers and learners. The more controlled the summative assessments are, the less popular can be the formative ones, yet the more useful they are in supporting teaching and learning. Learners may need to be helped to understand this.

- ▶ Where the main assessments in the curriculum are influenced by performance outcomes or a behavioural objectives approach, formative assessments are of less interest to learners — until they see assessment in a broader light.
- ▶ The greater the availability of educationally worthwhile resources to promote learning and assessment, the better and more popular are the formative assessments. Teacher needs to develop a collection of these and have them ready to hand in the clinical setting (or nearby).
- ▶ The culture of the institution and its dominant model of teaching and assessment seriously affects learners' attitudes to formative assessment. Teachers need to discuss assessment at 'faculty' level within a department so that there is a coherent policy that provides learners with a common approach.
- ▶ Where marks and grades matter more than words, formal summative assessment will be more popular. This is why teachers need to talk to learners about these things and offer them motivating examples of (small) assessment exercises that they enjoy and can see the educational point of. (Offering them this chapter to read and discussing it might be one useful resource to support this.)

The following factors are influential in relating teaching to learning through informal formative assessment.

- ▶ Informal formative assessment flourishes where there is a supportive but challenging environment and an appropriately open interaction between teacher and learner (where a professional conversation is a tradition).
- ▶ Anything that militates against learning is a threat to the usefulness of informal formative assessment.
- ▶ Affective factors are important. Learning involves trust and motivation, requires a safe environment where difficulties can be admitted and constructive responses offered; where there is awareness of the teacher's commitment, and the learner's wish to improve; where there is willingness to be creative and take risks.
- ▶ Teachers need to be overtly responsive to the achievements that result from a learner's informal formative assessment, because only through this will the process be fully educational and because how one such assessment is handled and responded to by that teacher will affect the learner's attitudes to and success in later assessments of this kind!
- ▶ Informal formative assessment thrives where there is trust. This is about: trust that the teacher is there to help but will not immediately rescue learner from mistakes or misunderstandings, but where necessary will ultimately offer more enlightenment; and trust that the teacher understands the learner, really knows what is to be learnt, understands the task, and can help the learner to learn.
- ▶ Informal formative assessment is also about equipping the learner with an understanding of 'where they need to get to' in their learning. It provides the learner with a sense of what to strive for and how that relates to where they currently are.

Good assessment generally rests on getting right the degree of explicitness about what the assessment requires. This demands careful use of words and an awareness of their nuance, and a balance of detail about what the assessments require of the learner. Such detail needs to be not too much, but not too little. It is also important to provide a chance for the learner to *talk* about the requirements of the assessment with teacher before engaging in the task.

Endnote

In this chapter we have explored a principled approach to enriching the practice of teaching, learning and assessment in PGME, through informal formative assessment. This is intended to enable teachers to use assessment in more educational ways. We have also explored practical ways in which teachers can become properly creative about the assessment processes they use to promote learning.

But so far in Part Two, in order to focus sharply on this (and in order to demonstrate some ways of enriching learning and teaching in chapters nine and ten), we have focused on teaching, learning and assessment more-or-less separately, thus teasing apart these three processes whilst at the same time arguing that they are really part of education as a whole. The final chapter will now seek to bring these all together in the context of the formal assessment processes of PGME, and to show how the 'tools of the trade' could be relocated into the moral mode of practice.