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Teacher-led
Learning Circles
for Formative Assessment

Teacher-Led Learning Circles for Formative Assessment: FINAL REPORT URUGUAY



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**Teacher-Led Learning Circles for
Formative Assessment Project**

Eloísa Bordoli



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Part 1: Country Profile

1. National Education System

Since the last quarter of the 19th century, Uruguay has had a robust public education system. The system is independent from the Ministry of Education and Culture. In this regard, the Constitution of the Eastern Republic of Uruguay, as stated in Articles 202 onwards, establishes that education must be governed by one or more independent bodies. The National Administration of Public Education (ANEP) is the independent body responsible for public education from early childhood to upper secondary education and non-university tertiary education. It was created by Law No. 15.739 on March 28th 1985, once democracy was restored in Uruguay, after more than a decade of civil-military dictatorship (1973 – 1985).

The entire population has the right to access the education system free of charge from early childhood education to university level. General Education Law¹, No. 18.437, approved in 2008, established education as a fundamental human right, a public and social good, as well being the responsibility of the State (URUGUAY, 2008, Art. 1 and 2). This law sets out the aims and general guidelines for education, the principles governing it as well as national educational policies. It also establishes the structures of the Public Education System and the remit and governance of each of the entities and subsystems that comprise it. The guiding principles enshrined in Law No. 18.437 refer to the universal, compulsory, free and secular nature of public education. In addition to these is the respect for diversity and inclusive education, the value of teacher and student participation in different areas of education governance, academic freedom and educational freedom (URUGUAY, 2008, Art. 6 to 11 and 15 to 18).

In 2020, an Urgent Consideration Law, No. 19.889², was approved, which, in section III modified central aspects of General Education Law No. 18.437. Although the stated aims and principles were unchanged, key aspects were changed. These included: eliminating the National Public Education System and the areas where the public teaching bodies coordinated³, restricting teacher participation⁴, replacing Early Childhood, Primary, Secondary and Technical Vocational Education Councils with General Directorates, excluding teacher representatives from the new General Directorates and restricting educational autonomy by giving greater relevance to the Ministry of Education and Culture (URUGUAY, 2020, art. 146). In addition, the law enabled the commodification of education by eliminating the express ban on the State entering into international cooperation agreements with organisations that “encourage the commodification” of education (URUGUAY, 2020: art. 129).

Organisation of Public Education: Early Childhood, Primary, Secondary and Non-University Tertiary Education

The National Administration of Public Education is the state body, autonomous and independent from the Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC), that is responsible for the

1 Hereinafter referred to as LGE No. 18.437.

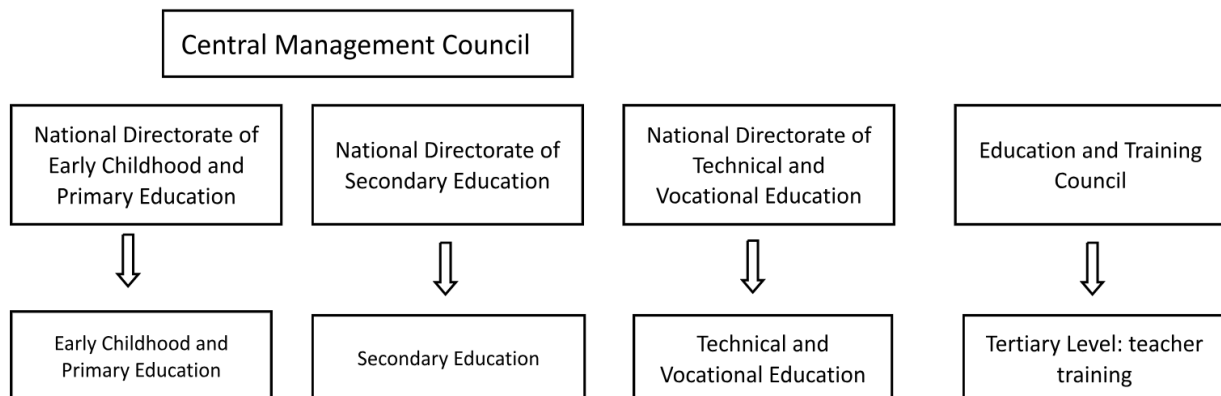
2 Hereinafter referred to as LUC No. 19.889.

3 The three independent education bodies are: the National Public Education Administration (ANEP), the University of the Republic (Udelar) and the Technological University (UTEC).

4 As established in articles 142, 143, 144, 148, 151, 152, 155, 156 157 (URUGUAY, 2020).

planning, management and administration of the public education system for early childhood, primary, secondary and non-university tertiary education. This body is headed by the Central Management Council (Codicen) and the current General Directorates for Early Childhood and Primary Education, Secondary Education and for Technical and Vocational Education, as well as by the Education⁵ Training Council.

Table 1: Organisational Chart of Public Education



Source: compiled by authors

Public Education Governance: Early Childhood, Primary, Secondary and Non-University Tertiary Education

The National Administration of Public Education is an independent body responsible for early childhood, primary, secondary and technical-vocational education, as well as public education training. It also oversees and inspects private education.

The National Administration of Public Education (ANEP), the University of the Republic (Udelar) and the Technological University (UTEC) are independent bodies which, by definition, means they set their own budget and have technical, financial, administrative and governance autonomy. The governing bodies of the education entities are elected in accordance with their scope. At Udelar, there are elections for the three branches (lecturers, students and graduates) to choose their representatives for the Central Management Council and the University Senate, as well as for faculties and schools. In contrast, in the ANEP the Central Management Council (Codicen) is elected by parliament (with special majorities) after a proposal by the Executive. Furthermore, Law No. 18.437 stipulates that two out of five of the council members must be elected by teachers.

⁵ Under General Education Law No. 18.437, early childhood, primary, secondary and technical vocational education were headed by a Council, a collegiate body with direct teacher representation. Urgent Consideration Law No. 19.889 of 2020 did away with the Councils, replacing them with Directorates under the responsibility of one individual.

Levels, stages and modalities

Formal education is organised according to the levels and modalities of the different stages of the educational process. It enables the continuity of educational pathways across different levels (URUGUAY, 2008, art. 22). Education is compulsory from level 4 of early childhood education to upper secondary.

Table 2: Formal Education, Structure and Levels:

Level	Description	Mission
0	Early Childhood Education (3-5 years)	Stimulate emotional, social, motor, and intellectual development (...) Promote comprehensive education that fosters the social inclusion of the learner, as well as self-awareness, awareness of their family environment, community and the natural world" (URUGUAY, 2008, art. 24).
1	Primary Education (theoretical age 6-11 years)	Provide basic knowledge and initiate the process of incorporating core literacy skills, with particular emphasis on mother tongue, second language, math, logical reasoning, art, recreation, sports and social skills that enable pupils to live together in the community responsibly" (URUGUAY, 2020, art. 133).
2	Lower Secondary Education (theoretical age 12-15 years)	Covers lower secondary school, after primary education. Further develop acquired skills and knowledge and promote theoretical and practical proficiency in different subjects which can include, artistic, biological, scientific and technological areas and the humanities" (URUGUAY, 2008, art. 26)
3	Upper Secondary Education (theoretical age 15-18 years)	Comprises the three years following the completion of lower secondary education and constitutes the final stage of compulsory education. Upper secondary education certificates enable pupils to continue with tertiary education studies, including undergraduate university studies" (URUGUAY, 2020, art. 134)

Source: Compiled by authors based on General Education Law 18.437 and including the changes in Urgent Consideration Law 19.889 of 2020

The Education Transformation plan implemented by the current government reorganised basic education into three cycles and six phases; there are 9 levels, 8 of which are compulsory.

Table 3: Organisation of the curriculum for basic comprehensive education (EBI):

Cycle	Phase	Levels	General Directorate
1	1	Year 3 to 5	DGEIP
	2	Year 1 and 2	
2	3	Year 3 and 4	
	4	Year 5 and 6	
3	5	Year 7 and 8	DGES
	6	Year 9	DGETP

Source: Compiled by authors based on General Education Law 18.437 and including the changes in Urgent Consideration Law 19.889 of 2020

Public education provision and enrolment

Education in the country from early childhood to higher education is predominantly public. This can be seen when looking at enrolment figures, as well as the number of educational institutions and teaching staff. Most private institutions are authorised which means they must adopt official ANEP plans and programmes and be supervised and inspected by the competent bodies of the state. Below we can see the distribution of public education based on data from the Ministry of Education and Culture available in the Statistical Yearbook of Education 2018, updated to June 2020.

Early Childhood and Primary Education: when comparing enrolment in the public and private sector, one can see that three out of every four young children attend public institutions, representing 83% of authorised establishments in the country.

As regards primary education, there is more public education provision than in early childhood education. 82% of student enrolment is in public schools and 83% of schools belong to the ANEP.

Table 4: Public Education:

Early Childhood		
Location	Institutions	Enrolment
Montevideo	132	62 241
Rest of the country	63	27 433
Total	195 (83%)	89 674 (76%)
Primary		
Location	Institutions	Enrolment
Montevideo	269	76 992
Rest of the country	1799	165 949
Total	2068 (83%)	242 941 (82%)

Source: Compiled by authors based on data from the MEC Statistical Yearbook 2018, updated to 2020

Lower and Upper Secondary Education⁶:

In lower secondary education (comprising both secondary and technical-vocational education), enrolment in public institutions accounts for 83%, with three out of every four establishments being state-run. Furthermore, when looking at both upper secondary and the various modes

⁶ Secondary education is organised into two subsystems: The General Directorate for Secondary Education and the General Directorate for Technical-Vocational Education

of technical-vocational education together, we can see that the average percentage of pupils enrolled in public institutions is 93%. For secondary education, enrolment stands at 87%, while in technical-vocational education, almost all enrolment is in public institutions. Three-quarters of establishments at this level of education are also public.

Table 5: Number of Educational Institutions and Enrolment

Public Basic Secondary Education		
	High Schools / Technical Schools	
Location	Institutions	Enrolment
Montevideo	122	35 764
Rest of the country	441	82 859
Total	563 (75%)	118 623 (83%)
Public Upper Secondary Education		
Montevideo	98	55,622
Rest of the country	360	101 831
Total	458 (73%)	157 453 (93%)

Source: Compiled by authors based on data from the MEC Statistical Yearbook 2018

Based on the information provided and when comparing enrolment from 2000 to 2018, the following aspects were observed in the ANEP:

- a) There was an increase in enrolment at all levels of the ANEP, except in primary education. This was not due to a fall in coverage, which remained universal, but was influenced by three related factors: demographic changes, improvements in grade progression⁷ and a shift of enrolment to the private sector (ANEP-Codicen, 2020, 14).
- b) Enrolment in basic secondary education (secondary and technical-vocational education) increased by 20.6%. This increase was considerably higher for technical-vocational education.
- c) Enrolment in upper secondary education increased by 33.8% (ANEP-Codicen, 2020, 18).

Teacher Profile in Early Childhood and Primary Education

In the Early Childhood and Primary Education General Directorate, the teacher census showed there were 23 390 in-service teachers. One characteristic was the number of women in

⁷ The school repetition rate in primary education halved between 2000 and 2019, from 10% to 5% of pupils enrolled (ANEP-Codicen 2020, 14).

the profession, representing 91.7% (ANEP, Codicen, 2019). Another feature was that all in-service teachers were qualified. Teacher training lasts four years and is non-university tertiary education. The latest available data revealed that 98.9% of teacher training was public (MEC, 2019). The changes established by the Urgent Consideration Law (2020) and the subsequent MEC decrees could potentially alter the state's dominance in teacher training. 88% of in-service teachers are between 31 and 60 years of age.

Table 6: Distribution of Teachers by Age Group

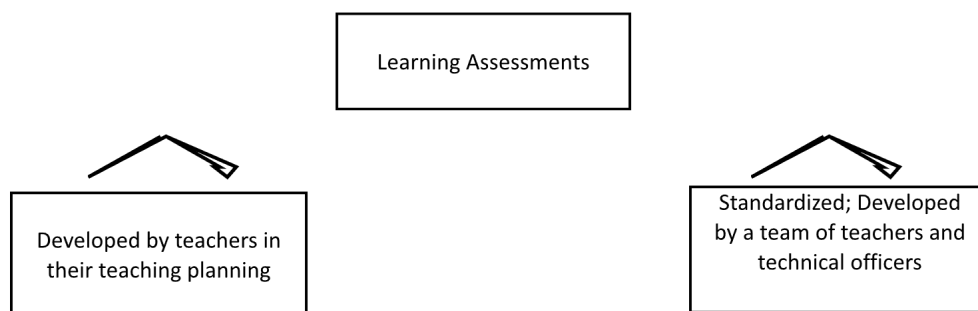
Age Range	Primary Education
Aged 30 and younger	14%
31-45	50%
45-60	33%
Aged 60 and over	3%

Source: Teacher Census 2018

2. National Assessment Policies

In Uruguay, learning assessment for early childhood and primary education is mixed. Traditional modalities developed by teachers, in line with what they have planned for that academic year, coexist with assessments developed within the Learning Assessment System (SEA) framework, implemented on a voluntary basis since 2007. SEA tests are developed by teachers and technical teams from the Early Childhood and Primary Education General Directorate and the Research and Statistics Division of the Central Management Council's Sectoral Directorate of Educational Planning. The first modality is heterogeneous and is related to the educational knowledge teachers acquire in their teacher training and in-service training courses. The second modality is standardised and conducted online, as will be explained in the following paragraphs.

Table 7: Learning assessments system:



Source: Compiled by authors based on ANEP sources

Strengths and Weaknesses of Standardised Tests

Assessment policies: the rationale behind them and progress

As stated, it is the Research, Assessment and Statistics Division (DIEE), along with a team of teachers and assessment specialists who design the tests that will be made available to any teacher wishing to use them.

The Learning Assessment Department of the DIEE is responsible for assessing school performance across the ANEP subsystems so as to provide information to different stakeholders and advise CODICEN. To assess learning, a formative approach has been chosen, prioritising the use of results as an essential input to improve teaching practices aimed at promoting the comprehensive education of students. One of the Department's focuses is the Learning Assessment System (SEA) for early childhood and primary education. The National Administration of Public Education (ANEP) website states that:

Formative assessments are assessments for learning and not of learning. They allow decisions to be made that will improve learning and teaching processes. On the one hand, they encourage teachers to think about how students respond to a set of activities; on the other hand, real-time feedback enables students to reflect on their own learning process (National Administration of Public Education, Central Management Board [ANEP, Codicen], 2023⁸).

At the Early Childhood and Primary Education General Directorate, the Learning Assessment System offers tests that are conducted online at national level, using the technological infrastructure of the Ceibal Plan⁹.

Education authorities and a significant number of teachers appreciate that online formative assessment provides information on various aspects of learning. It contributes to generating inputs to be reflected on and based on which teachers can have collective discussions in schools.

Standardised assessments cannot capture the uniqueness of each student or the pace of progress of each group. Therefore, it is important these assessments do not impact student grades. They have a different aim: to identify strengths and weaknesses to support teaching and, above all, to be a tool for dialogue among teaching staff so they can agree on which aspects are relevant and on the levels required for a particular year. It is through collective discussions that education systems can make progress on student learning (Luaces, 2014, 14).

As indicated above, assessment tests are designed in coordination with the Technical Inspection and In-Service Training teams of the Early Childhood and Primary Education General Directorate. This ensures the tests and educational material generated are in line with didactic discourse and with the guidance provided by monitoring and support teams. Thus, tests are developed by teams of assessment specialists, teachers and supervisors who take part in drafting the different items. Once developed, they are piloted, assessed and finally selected to be part of the test.

8 <http://sea.anep.edu.uy/evaluaciones-formativas>

9 Plan Ceibal: Educational Connectivity in Basic Computing for Online Learning. The plan was launched in 2006 as part of the Frente Amplio government's Equity Plan. It aims to reduce inequities in access to technology and learning by ensuring there is one laptop per child in every state school in the country.

According to education authorities, the systematic implementation of formative assessment is characterised as being “the first system-level assessment that can be autonomously applied and that is created based on the participation and collaboration of different technical officers in the education system” (National Administration of Public Education, Central Board of Directors [ANEP, Codicen], 2023¹⁰).

Initially, assessments were comprised of reading and writing tests for the first year of primary education. In 2009 maths, reading and natural sciences tests were developed for second year students. These were then given to year six students in 2010.

In 2011, the first cycle of online formative assessments for year three to six primary pupils in the aforementioned subjects was completed. Since then they have been conducted annually in the middle of the school year.

Between 2015 and 2020, formative assessments were expanded and diversified, as can be seen in the following table (National Administration of Public Education, Central Management Council [ANEP, Codicen], 2023¹¹).

Table 8: Formative Assessment in Primary Education from 2015 to 2020

Year	Formative Assessment
2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cycle of formative assessment from 3rd to 6th year primary - English Assessment - Start of collaboration with the Global Learning Network
2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cycle of formative assessment from 3rd to 6th year primary - Adaptive English Assessment - Inclusion of the assessment tool module for Global Learning Network centres. - Application of the tool, Teacher Self-assessment, and Welcome Survey via SEA
2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cycle of formative assessment from 3rd to 6th year primary and from 1st to 3rd year lower secondary - Adaptive English Assessment - Piloting assessments for reading, writing and speaking (LEOs) for 2nd year primary, implemented independently only in a handful of centres. - Application of the assessment tool, Teacher Self-assessment and Welcome Survey via SEA for Global Network centres
2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cycle of formative assessment from 3rd to 6th year primary and from 1st to 3rd year lower secondary - Adaptive English Assessment - Reading, writing, and speaking assessment (LEO) for 2nd year primary - SEA+ proof of concept in voluntary schools in Canelones. - Provision of resources for Global Network centres

10 <https://sea.anep.edu.uy/historia>

11 <https://sea.anep.edu.uy/historia>

2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cycle of formative assessment from 3rd to 6th year primary and from 1st to 3rd year lower secondary - Adaptive English Assessment - Reading, writing, and speaking assessment (LEO) for 2nd year primary - SEA+ proof of concept in voluntary schools in Canelones. Inclusion of other schools in Canelones - Provision of resources for Global Network centres
2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cycle of formative assessment from 3rd to 6th year primary and from 1st to 3rd year lower secondary - Adaptive English Assessment - Reading, writing and speaking assessment (LEO) for 2nd year primary - Lower secondary education certification test

Source: Compiled by authors based on data from the DIEE of the ANEP.

From a regulatory perspective, both technical and political authorities have supported the assessment process by sending out circulars aimed at ensuring tests are used and monitored. They also aim to ensure an analysis is carried out and subsequent work is done based on the results obtained.

From an institutional perspective, assessment:

(...) that is designed to be formative, focuses on providing teachers with information on activities, their objectives, the mathematical content at play, strategies students use or can use, the different types of mistakes that often arise when trying to solve certain problems, among other aspects. Therefore, the assessment does not aim to report learning achievements to the education system but is instead a tool aimed at contributing to teachers reflecting on their teaching practices. (ANEP, APORTES Mathematics Document, 2022, p. 7).

The technical arguments presented by monitoring teams and teachers who use formative assessment as a work tool are based on the fact that once assessments have been completed, teachers can revisit the activities, analyse each student's answers and discuss them. This way they can ask which procedures and strategies were used and why they gave those answers. It is this discussion that serves as a basis for teachers to refocus their teaching practices. In this regard:

(...) once you have ascertained the state and progress of student knowledge and know-how for completing maths activities, you can decide which teaching strategies to use so they continue the learning process. When carrying out the proposed activities, students can use different mathematical concepts as well as different procedures and representations, which might be right or wrong. One of the teacher's most important tasks is to detect mistakes in student output, record whether they are systematic and investigate the causes. Only after that will they look for ways to correct the mistakes. It is only possible to perform this task by assessing through reflecting. By taking this approach, they can identify significant mistakes in particular (Chemello, 2004, p.70 in: ANEP-Codicen, APORTES Maths Document, 2022, p. 8 and 9).

Using this approach, assessment activities become valuable input that reflect where each student is in their learning for the subjects assessed. It also offers new ways to teach a range of contents.

Identifying knowledge applied, recognising strategies used and describing the procedures developed are fundamental contributions to student feedback and for refocusing teaching. In the words of Anijovich, “The aim of formative assessment is to offer guidance and suggestions to each student during the learning process, when there is still time to improve any aspect of this process”. (Anijovich, González, 2013, p. 11).

Teacher lifelong learning

As regards teacher training for working with formative assessment, it is necessary to specify that this has mainly been carried out through DIEE specialists and teams of inspectors and directors. Although the Early Childhood and Primary Education Council created the In-Service Training Institute in 2014, teacher training was mainly aimed at strengthening both knowledge about subjects and at the didactic aspects of each area of knowledge. Thus assessment was looked at based on how to teach each subject and no specific training was offered on formative assessment.

In reconsidering this issue today within this ongoing research project, we recognise the importance of implementing specific training on the concept of assessing for learning based on two perspectives: on the one hand, assessing student learning to identify the knowledge that will serve as a basis for making progress on knowledge building. On the other hand, promoting critical thinking by teachers on the proposed assessment and on the learning outcomes achieved from specific activities and how to adapt them to each student so everyone progresses according to their own learning process. Analysing student learning outcomes means recognising what they know, which results in correct answers, and understanding the workings they used that underpin incorrect answers. It is worth noting that behind every mistake there is knowledge a child has chosen to use for their answer, despite that knowledge not being appropriate for successfully solving the activity.

Arguments against standardised assessments

There is no consensus on standardised assessments nationally in the teaching profession nor in teacher unions. One of the reasons they are rejected, is their association with assessments promoted by international education credit organisations, such as PISA¹². External restrictions, as well as the imposition of reforms or curricular changes based on test results and guidelines provided by these organisations are rejected as they interfere in national policies and the academic freedom of teachers.

At the same time, there is a critical view of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development’s concept of education (OECD), which is limited to being subsidiary to the needs of the market. From this point of view, it follows that education should be limited to training human resources for the world of work. Looking at it from this perspective, people’s criticisms centre around the reductive approach to education as there is an attempt to eliminate

12 PISA: Programme for International Student Assessment of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

comprehensive, humanistic and critical thinking training. The OECD's view of education, as well as that of other international organisations and their national representatives, is based on seeing individuals as efficient and productive, seeking to eliminate their ability to be critical and emancipatory.

There are two additional arguments against such assessments. One is that they are imposed and the other is how foreign the proposals are. This imposition implies teacher professionalism and academic freedom are limited. Furthermore, the fact that proposals are external means they are [not] considered to be related to professional aspects of didactic development and to the particularities of each learning group. Teachers argue they have specific and particular knowledge about each group and each teaching setting.

In light of the above, it is worth noting that the proposed Formative Learning Assessment (SEA) designed within the framework of the ANEP presents elements that are different to other international standardised assessment modalities such as PISA. Because of this and due to the lack of consensus in the national teaching profession and teacher unions, it is necessary to have a pluralistic, participatory and in-depth debate on assessment policies.

3. Changes from 2020 onwards

As from 2020, when the new conservative government took office and in accordance with changes made to education, established in Section III of the Urgent Consideration Law (LUC), a process of Education Transformation began in Uruguay. The main changes were, inter alia: a "comprehensive overhaul of the curriculum", the "development of teaching policies", "school autonomy", a "review of management and supervisory roles", and "improved management".

The aforementioned changes were presented as innovations supporting the transformation process. However, a review of Early Childhood and Primary Education programmes revealed that some elements had long existed in Uruguayan public education, although the way they were presented in the so-called Comprehensive Transformation of the Curriculum (TCI) showed significant differences in concepts. This was the case for teacher participation in programme development, the concept of comprehensiveness, the skills-based approach, lifelong learning for teachers and assessment, among others.

The Comprehensive Transformation of the Curriculum was based on a series of documents that included the National Curriculum Framework, Learning Progressions, Progress Milestone Markers, the Integrated Basic Education Plan and Student Assessment Regulations. The Student Assessment Regulations (REDE) define the areas of application, general assessment provisions, progress markers and corresponding cycles. They also guide decision-making based on school trajectories and individual student performance, whilst taking into consideration diversity and attendance as a way to protect educational trajectories. They also include developing a well-founded description of each student that will serve both internal formative assessments carried out at institutional level and official external assessments. Lastly, they define support spaces, the need for registering, monitoring and protecting each student's educational trajectory, as well as the achievement criteria that define the level of progress of student learning at a given time and for accreditation purposes.

In accordance with what the document proposes:

Assessment is a key element that must focus on both processes and results. It also takes into account the complexity involved in learning. It is hoped that assessment will be continuous, comprehensive, humanising and focused on developing all student skills to learn (ANEP-Codicen, 2022, p. 9)¹³.

It is worth noting that, in addition to the importance that must be attached to students themselves, it is important to ensure assessment is heterogeneous. This means there is a need to pay attention to individual trajectories based on individual student needs. Expanding and enhancing learning opportunities, developing varied teaching resources and strategies as well as considering and understanding student processes and rhythms are vital when considering assessment tools.

An analysis of the REDE regulations shows there are some elements that differ from the idea of formative assessment developed above. One of these is the fact that, although the centrality of the student is emphasised, there is little reference made to assessment as part of the teaching process and, in this sense, as something that favours refocusing teaching practices based on student needs.

Furthermore, the document states that “The graduation profile, progress milestone markers and progressions are components of the curriculum that guide teacher planning, structuring their teaching and assessment in relation to learning goals and achievement criteria”. (ANEP-Codicen, 2022, p. 9). As such, it is difficult to identify where formative assessment fits into the student trajectory since it is the graduation profiles, progress milestone markers and learning progressions that describe progress made for each skill’s continuum. These are what guide teaching.

Although the REDE refer to the centrality of the student and to the heterogeneity of the population, they do not refer to the diversity of teaching strategies. Rather they refer to creating support systems in a way that leans more towards a palliative approach instead of focusing on diversity.

Finally, when referring to learning assessments, Article 21 of the REDE states that “In order to express the degree of progress of student learning at a given time, based on achievement criteria specified in the programmes, as well as for accreditation purposes, a table located in Appendix 2 will be used. This table provides descriptors associated with achievement levels and it is based on these that student progress is determined and a grade assigned.

As a closing remark, and without carrying out an exhaustive analysis of the place of formative assessment in our country, we believe that, although it has existed for a long time and is still being discussed today, there is evidence to show that the meaning of this kind of assessment has changed.

In the words of Anijovich:

“The assessment of learning is associated with summative assessment, it measures what students know, demonstrates if they have reached the established standards and establishes a kind of ranking among them. Its purpose

13 ANEP-Codicen, 2022, disponible en: <https://www.anep.edu.uy/documentos-transformacion-curricular>

is to certify how much each person has learned...”, “Assessment for learning is related to formative assessment. It provides information to teachers with the aim of allowing them to modify their teaching practices and modify their students’ learning, while providing feedback so that students can improve their knowledge acquisition processes (Anijovich, González, 2013, p. 18).

4. Final considerations for part one

The first part of the report highlighted the fundamental characteristics of the public education system in Uruguay. Public education exists across the entire country. When looking at student enrolment as well as the number of schools, it is clear that historically public education has been extensive and robust. In early childhood and primary education, 8 out of 10 students attend state-run public schools and there is the same proportion of public education institutions: 8 out of 10.

Education is free, secular and has been compulsory since the last quarter of the 19th century. General Education Law, No. 18.437 of 2008, established education as a fundamental human right, a public and social good, as well as being the responsibility of the State. At the same time, progress has been made on processes of inclusion, respect for diversity and expanding teaching participation.

The Constitution of the Republic establishes that education is organised in independent bodies, separate from the Ministry of Education and Culture. This aims to maintain their independence from the party political interests of the government in office. In this way, the constitution seeks to ensure that education is shaped as a State policy.

In early childhood and primary education, all in-service teachers are qualified and have completed four-year tertiary non-university education. In addition, many lifelong learning policies have been developed.

In 2020, the new conservative government approved an Urgent Consideration Law. Section III of the law reversed a number of gains in education, including through eliminating the National System of Public Education and coordination between public teaching bodies, restricting teacher participation, replacing Councils with General Directorates, removing teacher representatives from the education subsystems’ governance, restricting independence around education by giving greater weight to the Ministry of Education and Culture and enabling education to be commodified.

The assessment system for learning in early childhood and primary education is mixed, using both traditional methods developed by teachers in teaching processes, as well as standardised formative learning assessments, developed within the Learning Assessment System (SEA) framework. The latter are voluntary and conducted once a year online. As discussed in chapter two of the report, in recent years, political and technical authorities have supported the development of the SEA. At the national teaching and union level, there is no consensus on standardised formative assessment. As such, it is necessary to create opportunities to hold discussions on the matter that are plural, participatory and in-depth.

When the new education authorities took office in 2020, the conservative government began a process they described as the Comprehensive Transformation of the Curriculum. As previously analysed, in this context formative assessment is still a subject for discussion rather than a practice. However, its meaning and place in student learning processes and in teacher teaching strategies have changed.

Part 2: Research Project Conclusions in Uruguay

5. National Approach Adopted for the Teacher-Led Learning and Thinking Circles

The Teacher-Led Learning and Thinking Circles were formed when teachers who were members the Teachers' Union (FUM-TEP)¹⁴ were invited to take part. The research team invited six teachers, also members of the union, to be coordinators and suggested they organise themselves into pairs of their choosing. Teachers were chosen based on their experience of working in a team and because they had skills that would facilitate participation, create low-risk environments and build knowledge by valuing the different contributions that emerged.

Once the pairs were formed, each of them invited colleagues from various schools to participate in a first virtual meeting where the proposal was presented and a brief presentation of the materials was given. These were subsequently sent via email to all participants.

Seeing as colleagues belonged to different groups and as the schools were in different territorial departments, the pairs prioritised online work. This way, they could overcome problems regarding distances and ensure they were available for meetings at specific times. A researcher and a union delegate, chosen by the union and in charge of coordination, took part in the teacher selection process and online and in-person meetings.

Below is a table summarising the characteristics of the schools and teachers who took part. These are those that completed the work in the learning and thinking circles and developed a complete portfolio.

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Table 9: Characteristics of schools, number of students per group and participating teachers

	Schools		Teacher				Pupils
	Department	Number	Category	Teacher	Experience	Year Group	Number of Students
Circle A	Montevideo	389	Kindergarten	Virginia Sorrondeguy	15 years	3 years	32
	Montevideo		Regular school	Noelia Berguerie	10 years	Year 6	28
	Canelones		Mainstream education	Natalia Averbug	3 years	Year 5	24
	Canelones	292	Kindergarten	Sofía Artagaveytia	3 years	Level 4 and 5	25
	Montevideo	219	Mainstream education	Noelia Müller	24 years	Year 6	27
	Montevideo	156	Practice school	Gabriela Dobal	25 Years	Year 1	20
	Montevideo	109	Practice school	Leticia Pini	20 Years	Year 1	29
	Canelones	57	Mainstream/rural education	Katherine González	4 years	N.I to year 6	18
Circle B	Flores	31	Mainstream education	Santiago Fierro	3 years	First year level 4	14
	Flores	31	Mainstream education	Sandra Rojas	30 years	Year 2	25
	Flores	31	Mainstream education	Graciela Rodríguez	8 years	Year 1	15
	Flores	31	Mainstream education	Lorena González	2 years	Year 3	27

Source: Authors own compilation

The data provided correspond to the schools and teachers who completed the work in the project. Although there were three pairs of coordinators formed at the start and three learning circles, one was unable to progress as teachers began dropping out for different reasons.

6. Promising practices of Teacher-Led Formative Assessment

As indicated in the first part of the report, Uruguayan education uses a mix of assessment modalities: standardised and external, as well as assessments designed by teachers in the context of their teaching tasks. In this last modality, assessments are part of didactic sequences and aim not only to assess student knowledge acquisition processes but also teaching processes, and, in turn, to identify hurdles and aspects that need to be revisited by the teacher with both individuals and the group.

In recent years, technical authorities in early childhood and primary education, as well as teachers, have gradually shifted from summative to formative assessment. However, it is worth noting that currently both assessment modalities coexist in different measure in the education subsystems (early childhood and primary, lower secondary, upper secondary, technical and tertiary).

In this context, the FUM-TEP and EI proposal to develop “Teacher-Led Learning and Thinking Circles” was well received by teachers. The creation of specific spaces and times to share, analyse, reflect and learn about formative assessment was highly appreciated. Teachers said the circles allowed them to learn from their peers, engage with relevant literature and recognise and reflect on their own assessment practices. For example, one teacher noted in her portfolio:

“Participating in the various exchanges was extremely enriching and involved true learning” (Teacher 12).

Another teacher added:

“A decisive moment for me during the entire experience was when, through reflecting on my formative assessment practices and while searching for evidence, I was not only able to remember but also properly appreciate the moments when students took full ownership. (...) Therefore, my current aims will be to listen to my students more and continue learning from them” (Teacher 7).

Below is a table outlining various formative assessment practices designed and implemented by teachers. These were more common in the subjects of Language and Maths. However, there were also examples for Sciences (Sexual Education) and Geography. These practices emerged in the portfolios and stories teachers told in the circles. The second column in the table lists practices, according to how the teachers described them. The third column provides some teacher testimonies¹⁵. The practices were grouped around: learning intentions and success criteria, use of questions and discussions in the classroom, feedback, self-assessment and peer assessment. A further three practices were added: one related to how people got on in the classroom and school (coexistence), another to teacher observations and records on the impact of follow-up and timely interventions and the third to portfolios for each child, especially related to written language skills.

¹⁵ The testimonials, narratives, examples and images provided primarily come from the portfolios. The teachers have been numbered consecutively from 1 to 18. Two of the participating teachers did not submit a portfolio; therefore, they were not assigned a number.

Table 10: Formative Assessment Practices

Formative Assessment Practices	Examples by Teachers and Recorded in Portfolios	Teacher Testimonies
Learning intentions and success criteria	Success criteria, e.g., related to reading and writing; Assessments in the Learning Assessment System (SEA); Rubric Rubrics made by teachers or students	"Rubrics provide clear criteria for assessing student performance and facilitate feedback. They help students understand what is expected from the task and how they can improve. Promotes self-reflection" (Teacher 4). "What I do is: a) I explain to the children what the activity is about and what I expect from them; b) I observe the progress made and obstacles faced by each child for each activity; c) I ask for self-assessment, and d) with this they perform a metacognition exercise" (Teacher 5)
Use of questions and discussions in the classroom	Guiding questions and collective or small group discussions; Organising and recording ideas on a topic collectively on chart paper (prior knowledge, what we already know, questions that can be researched); Tasks to reflect in groups or pairs, among students of different or equal levels of understanding; Tasks involving students identifying strengths and weaknesses in learning something specific; Using and analysing mistakes	"Difficult situations where, after working in pairs or individually, they must share with the rest of the class the paths they used to find solutions" (Teacher 1) "Organise, guide. Asking questions stimulates participation, critical thinking and classroom discussion. Fosters critical thinking, problem-solving and exploring ideas. Helps build knowledge" (Teacher 13)
Feedback	Written feedback in notebooks, meaning asking a new question about what the student has been working on; Rewrites; Activities for keeping records (e.g., geometry); Individual feedback, group work to see results of achievements, group and individual follow-up, individual rewriting; Activities proposed to students involving feedback and reflecting on what has been learned	"Allows you to see the process, know where one can be self-critical and reflect on what each person does/have; to understand the level of autonomy for written production" (Teacher 10)

<p>Self-assessment and peer assessment</p>	<p>Use of traffic light system for student self-assessment, peer assessment or teacher assessment Assessment with numerical codes: for self or peer assessment</p> <p>Writing portfolios; examples of self and peer assessment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Correcting my classmate's text; - Circling the letters; - Hunting for misspelled words; - Traffic light system for texts; - Creating our own colour codes; - Correction between students using codes created; - Making our own rubrics; - Dictation with "Speaking Hands" sign language method; - Correcting texts as a group; - Notes on written productions. <p>Self-assessment using numbers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Table to recognise numbers and indicate if they think they can complete the task 	<p>"The biggest challenge was designing the questions for the self-assessment table: clearly defining what we wanted to know, drafting it in a way that could be understood and explaining it accurately to the girls and boys" (Teacher 1)</p>
<p>Others related to coexistence</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Formative assessment linked to coexistence in the classroom and common spaces such as breaktimes. <p>Work in assemblies with class representatives: clearly set out and agree on coexistence guidelines collectively, write them down;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Self and peer assessment in conflicts; - Class assemblies year 5 and 6 : propose solutions; -Vote on the different solutions; - Solutions are recorded and bulletin boards made 	
<p>Observation and follow-up records</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Small notes recorded in student notebooks or in teacher documents; -Photographic, video or audio records; -Observation practices in specific situations with the aim of assessment 	
<p>Children's portfolios</p>	<p>Use of portfolios, notebooks where students and teachers can view progress throughout the school year</p>	<p>"Writing portfolio: they write one text per month and anyone completing all years in the rural school can see the whole cycle" (Teacher 7)</p> <p>"The writing portfolio is a repository of samples from different times of the year in which the girls and boys wrote about different experiences. It allows us to keep track of the starting point and the progress made as the work progresses" (Teacher 12)</p>

One aspect worth noting is that most teachers worked on projects that included a range of areas of knowledge, several activities and formative assessment modalities. For example, one Year 6 teacher worked on the “Comprehensive Sexual Education” project, another on the project “We All Count” and another on “Autobiographies and School History”. For the last project, the teacher observed:

“The children had to create a group yearbook containing information about the group and students to give to the school. We also worked on autobiographies that were given orally and in writing. Some of the activities I suggested were: a) produce their autobiography as a draft, b) carry out a self-assessment using a guide to revise the writing, c) individual rewriting, d) peer assessment using a form developed by the teacher, e) final written draft” (Teacher 4).

7. Technology and Formative Assessment

In Uruguay, the Ceibal Plan was launched in 2007, which entailed providing one computer per child. This plan came with courses aimed at teachers on the use of digital platforms and technologies. Facilitators were also appointed to assist schools with implementing the technology. At the same time, fibre optics and connectivity in educational establishments and public spaces (parks, etc.) was extended. Additionally, the Sectoral Directorate of Education Planning of the ANEP Central Management Council promoted an online assessment and the Learning Assessment System. As explained, this system offered various kinds of formative assessment that teachers could use if they wanted. These policies, promoted under the progressive government, and maintained under the current government, have allowed people to become familiar with using technology in the classroom.

Several teachers among the circle participants used technology in their formative assessment practices. However, its use was considered to be an additional resource and was not prioritised. Teachers used technological resources using two strategies. One was using the Learning Assessment System (SEA). As mentioned in the first part of the report, this system provides assessment tools for learning. These are online, on the platform and teachers can freely select the tools of their choosing. The second was when, in some circumstances, teachers developed activities for children to work on using the laptops provided by the Ceibal Plan.

8. Formative Assessment and Feedback for Students

Initially, many teachers found it difficult to see evidence of their students' progress. However, by discussing, reading through and planning specific activities, they began to appreciate the small actions they were carrying out on a daily basis that were contributing to procedural and formative assessment. These first steps allowed them to reflect on their own practices and those of their colleagues. In this regards, one teacher declared:

“I understand that looking for evidence of what I do in the classroom, considering activities that were perhaps not initially intended as assessment but eventually turned into it, along with being given the chance to design our own assessment based on this work, was what guided my practices”. (Teacher 8).

Once they had this awareness, they began identifying evidence and putting it together in their portfolios. It is possible to see in the portfolios, inter alia, sequences of children's work that showed the effects of peer feedback (co-assessment), personalised activities given by the teachers, their notes and self-correction sheets. Some portfolios also contained photos documenting group discussions, work in small subgroups and group flipcharts. Four examples were selected from different portfolios: the first was a study guide sheet provided by the teacher aimed at guiding peer assessment in a writing production task, the second was a self-assessment sheet, the third was a photo of collaborative work among peers with the teacher's guidance in early childhood education and the fourth was a poster created by the group when they had a collective discussion and exchange of ideas.

Table 11: Examples of Formative Assessment Recorded in Portfolios

Example 1: peer assessment, guide sheet on narrative writing	Example 2: self-assessment, guide sheet on reading
Example 3: collaborative work	Example 4: group discussion and writing a collective summary on a topic

Source: Compiled by authors based on teacher portfolios

Some of the statements provided by teachers in the final discussions in the circles showed their own process of awareness and reflection around their students' work: "they investigate, create, solve problems, develop proposals, produce, progress", etc.

It is worth noting that the formative assessment practices most frequently used by teachers included: individual and group questions, group discussions, clarifying learning intentions and success criteria, self-assessment, peer assessment, notes and personalised follow-up by the teacher.

As for using questions and group discussions, one of the teachers stated:

"I understand that **when it came to sharing**, when each person had to articulate their reasoning and describe what they had produced, they faced a new challenge. On the one hand, they had to put forward their rationale and how they developed what they had. On the other, it was an opportunity for those who had not understood or who had faced challenges to find solutions by taking ownership - at least in part - of what others had been able to do". (Teacher 1).

Reviewing tasks became a joint activity conducted with the student: they were asked about what they have developed, asked new questions and were encouraged to improve their work a little more. The activity written down in the notebook (or other tool) was shared: the girl or boy read what the teacher had written, reviewed their work and produced something new or complementary to the initial work. (Teacher 9).

“... when working in small groups (6/7 children), feedback and mistakes were fundamental. I generally used the opinion or answer given by one student to support or help others who had not achieved the stated aim. Furthermore, in activities with the entire group (at the expected level for that age range) they reflected on what had been learned and what remained to be learned. In this setting most students could see the journey and appreciate it. This made some of them feel more empowered”. (Teacher 6).

As for self and peer assessment, as well as teacher notes and follow-up, all were valued as being knowledge acquisition processes. The role the children played in this process was also appreciated, as was the fact that the level of motivation to complete tasks increased. In line with this, teachers pointed out there was: cognitive construction, reflecting on their own processes and that “constructive mistakes” had their place. They were also enriched by interacting with peers and because they were intrinsically motivated.

Teachers emphasised that self and peer assessment “fostered student involvement, giving them an active role in their learning process” (Teacher 10). In their own words they said:

“Formative assessment allowed students to learn specific skills. It facilitated more interactive learning. It helped activate students’ prior knowledge, facilitating the building of new ideas”. (Teacher 4)

“Self and peer assessment encouraged students to reflect on their own work and how they could improve it. They learned to self-regulate and outline their learning. Furthermore, the opportunity to be assessed by peers was a source of intrinsic motivation for students, as they experienced a sense of achievement when receiving positive and constructive feedback”. (Teacher 15).

Another point they made was about roles shifting in the classroom. Students took on a more active and autonomous role with respect the figure of the teacher. One of the teachers expressed: “We observed an increase in motivation and taking initiative, they showed a greater interest and desire to learn (...). Students developed more critical thinking skills and openness, gradually becoming less dependent on the teacher’s feedback and assessment as being the only ways to measure their progress”. (Teacher 2).

9. Benefits of Formative Assessment for Teacher Practices

Teachers acknowledged that the experience of the thinking and learning circles was positive. In the words of one teacher:

“Personally, I acquired tools that have been very useful when identifying classroom practices related to formative assessment, which perhaps I wouldn’t have been able to do otherwise. Additionally, one of the takeaways of the enriching practice of teachers exchanging ideas was the fact that space and time were provided to reflect on the topic at hand. This allowed us to self-assess as teachers (...). I was able to learn from others and appreciate formative assessment practices”. (Teacher 7)

Another teacher stated:

“The results from collaborative learning were always positive. These moments had an impact on my work because from now on, I will be more aware of its importance, which will allow me to give it a more visible and central role in my daily practices. This means I will be able to redirect my practices and implement new strategies, always with the ultimate goal of improving our students’ learning”. (Teacher 9)

In the learning circles work, teachers said that becoming aware of their daily actions in the classroom and the pedagogical work based on formative assessment modalities had challenged their role as teachers. They identified the fact that they had been taking on a “new teaching role”. As teachers articulated it, they said they saw themselves as “guides”, “helping to correct courses of action”, “providing criteria for decision-making”, “helping them to reflect”, “being more a of a source of available information, providing information according to what the children requested”, “feeling like mediators for things students could not resolve themselves”, etc.

Teachers mentioned a change in teaching practices that led them to take on a new teaching role vis-a-vis knowledge, students and their particular characteristics, as well as in relation to the class as a group. There was a shift towards learners playing a more active role and teachers being more targeted and precise with teaching tasks. This meant teachers’ attitudes changed and that the support they provided was tailored to the different paces of knowledge acquisition. One teacher said: “the key is knowing how to listen to girls and boys, trying to read the group to adjust tasks so that everyone can access them” (Teacher 1).

On this matter, another teacher pointed out:

“The FA strategies implemented (peer-assessment, self-assessment using tools: rubrics, sheets, etc.; analysis and collective reflection; group projects) increased the likelihood of providing timely tasks that promoted progress in learning, as well as promoting teacher self-assessment”. (Teacher 2)

The changing role of the teacher did not only affect classroom pedagogical work but also meant planning needed to be changed. In the words of one teacher:

“Planning for learning allowed me to include some aspects that made it possible to see how much girls and boys were understanding about what had been worked on”. (Teacher 1)

“... it allowed me to know how girls and boys felt about their learning, how they perceived what they knew or didn’t know. I could replan what we covering, focus on students who needed more support. New activities were proposed in order to delve deeper into what needed to be learned”. (Teacher 9)

Teachers were also aware of the daily challenges they faced. These included bureaucratic tasks required by the system, almost no time and space to meet their peers in school and having a multitude of tasks to complete. For example, one teacher noted:

“There are many working hours, double shifts, tiredness. The task will be determined by the time available for planning, reviewing actions and activities, recording observations made along the way, reading, studying, organising materials, acquiring other materials”. (Teacher 12)

However, teachers did identify elements that gave them strength and supported them in their school work. In addition to the work done in the learning and thinking circles, several teachers pointed out there was: “experience”, “teamwork”, “working with my peers”, among other ways that supported working in a critical and reflective manner.

“The flow of ideas amongst colleagues triggered ideas of my own, and, in my case in particular, prompted me to rethink how I approach assessment. I created new devices and recreated strategies”. (Teacher 15).

Another teacher stated:

“I am passionate about the collective work between teachers and the community to enhance learning and influence who we are. I expect the groups of teachers to be committed to offering and building the most powerful experiences possible, which captivate the educational community and especially children, guaranteeing their right to education”. (Teacher 1).

10. Benefits of using formative assessment for student learning

As regards the benefits teachers identified in their students’ learning, these can be classified according to two main groups. The first refers to general benefits or benefits that “shaped” ways of learning. The second to specific benefits related to specific knowledge. In the first group, there were four main benefits: a) active role or place of the learner in learning, b) deeper metacognitive processes, c) increased confidence and motivation, d) collaborative and supportive work.

- a) As regards the benefits for student learning that shaped the ways they learned, it was possible to notice that students’ roles in how they acquired knowledge changed. Teachers stated that students took on an active role, a leading role, allowing them to fine tune and increase their ability to reflect as individuals and as a group. “At work I was more appreciative of the practices where students took complete ownership. By this I mean they were able to take control of their own assessment practices, reflecting, without noticing it, on which strategies helped them progress in their learning and reaffirm their knowledge. Therefore, I reached the conclusion it was very important to listen to them and know how they wanted to be assessed. They were able to create their own rubrics, with clear guidance from the teacher, and articulate which strategies allowed them to consolidate their knowledge, which resources, etc”.(Teacher 7)

This aspect was key because not only did it refer to particular knowledge and learning but also to a different attitude to knowledge in general and a recognition of what they were capable of, of their difficulties and learning processes. This was a matter of increased autonomy, of having a process that allowed them to continue learning in other contexts.

- b) Another benefit teachers identified was that using formative assessment deepened the students' metacognitive processes. There was self-assessment when using a guide or rubric, reflection on their "mistakes" or "difficulties", highlighted in discussions with the teacher or with their peers in peer-assessments. This enabled children to "put into words" their reasoning or describe what they had produced. This "putting into words" required a symbolic change of register whilst also requiring the children to analyse and reflect on what had been done in a specific situation. Furthermore, the need to put arguments forward about what had been developed enabled the development of language and logical reasoning. One teacher stated:

"I understand that when it came to sharing, when each person had to articulate their reasoning and describe what they had produced, they faced a new challenge. On the one hand, they had to put forward their rationale and how they had developed what they had. On the other hand, it was an opportunity for those who had not understood or who had faced challenges to find solutions by taking ownership - at least in part - of what others had been able to do". (Teacher 11).

- c) A third benefit of formative assessment for both teachers and children was that it was possible to visualise each person's unique learning process. Recording the development of each child's learning process gave them the opportunity to self-assess, value themselves and appreciate their abilities and progress. This provided an additional motivational boost whilst instilling confidence in the students. Regarding dealing with written language, one teacher stated:

"This record accompanied the girls and boys throughout the year. It could even be maintained throughout their schooling. It also served for them to review their own process, compare texts they had written, handwriting and how they had organised texts at different times. They were able to identify which writing situations most inspired them, which were most motivating. They could see what they had managed to improve and define what else they wanted to achieve". (Teacher 8).

In this regard, another teacher stated:

"The girls and boys became more confident in what they were doing. They appreciated their work, they didn't erase it. They interacted with what was written in the notebook: this was not just a record: it reflected rationale and learning. The teacher's writing was familiar to them, they saw her write and engaged with what was on written down on paper". (Teacher 1)

- d) Collaborative and supportive work among peers provided benefits that enriched learning processes. During these moments, in addition to passing on and taking ownership of values, learning processes were developed based on the contributions of others. In terms of socio-constructivism in teacher-led student groups, "socio-cognitive conflicts" arose, enabling exchanges, debates and learning processes to occur that sometimes contributed to cognitive change. The following images and the teacher's comment reflect this.

Table 1: Images of formative assessment through collaborative work

“This activity was carried out several times. Students divided themselves into different sized groups, not only identifying mistakes in the texts to be analysed but also rewriting the texts correctly”.
(Teacher 7)

Source: Compiled by authors based on teacher portfolios

The particular benefits of formative assessment in student learning processes can be seen from the various activities teachers recorded in their portfolios and shared in the learning circles. These mainly referred to written language acquisition and use and maths. Most examples presented focused on these aspects.

11. Professional Learning Processes to Support Teacher Formative Assessment Practices

Professional support for formative assessment practices came from the participants themselves, in conjunction with the contributions from the pairs of coordinators and support from the researcher and FUM-TEP representative.

The coordinators' leadership, together with the support of the researcher and the FUM-TEP representative, not only enabled but also continuously encouraged all teachers to participate. In this way, all voices were heard and opportunities were created to move towards building new knowledge. In this regard, active listening and introducing timely and open questions were vital for encouraging people to reflect on the various practices.

It is worth noting that these practices came from different contexts and covered a wide range of modalities: discussions, exchanges, analysis and reflection were the main work strategies.

Formative assessment practices were already familiar in schools and classrooms since this form of assessment had been implemented years ago at primary school level. However, the work in the circles significantly contributed to identifying a series of practices that were not always thought of or designed for assessment purposes. Because of this work these were brought to the fore and were reviewed from this perspective. Furthermore, the circles work was also shared with other groups. This was the case for schools that had times allocated for teacher meetings. Colleagues who were part of one of the circles had the opportunity to share their work.

Finally, there were no obstacles to this kind of practice because, as mentioned earlier, they were familiar practices that had been carried out in primary education establishments, either as internal standardised formative assessments or as assessments developed by the teachers themselves.

Part 3: Conclusions and Next Steps

Summary of Findings

In this section, we will present our thoughts and conclusions based on the findings of the Teacher-Led Learning and Thinking Circles in Uruguay. These will be organised into four main sections: a) key characteristics of formative assessment practices developed by teachers for students, b) main benefits of using formative assessment practices for teachers, c) characteristics of professional learning that support teacher formative assessment practices and d) key obstacles to effective formative assessment for teachers and students and strategies, if any, to address them.

a) Key characteristics of formative assessment practices developed by teachers for students

A key element teachers identified within the context of their circles work, was the awareness that many of the practices they developed in the classroom, which were often very small and conducted on a daily basis, had characteristics of procedural and formative assessment. Personalised follow-up, observations, notes in children's notebooks or in their daily records, discussions and reflecting collectively or in small groups, setting out achievement criteria, self-assessment sheets and peer-assessment were some of the activities they were able to give new meaning to. This metacognitive exercise and awareness enabled teachers to reach a new level of analysis of their teaching practices, allowing them to have a more comprehensive understanding of all of their teaching work. One effect of this was that the role of the teacher changed and students' roles became more active. This was not only in regards to their own individual learning processes but also as a group. We shall expand on this point in the following paragraph.

In the preceding sections, we indicated that formative assessment practices developed by teachers benefited student learning processes in two ways. One related to the specific knowledge (contents) or skills (competencies) of particular formative assessment practices associated with didactic sequences or projects being worked on. There was, however, also a second kind of benefit identified, which we have called general benefits or benefits that shape student ways of learning, of which there were four: a) the active role or place of the learner in learning associated with the different position or role the teacher adopted, as mentioned in the previous paragraph, b) the deepening of learner metacognitive processes by encouraging discussions, exchanges and debates about work done, c) increased confidence and motivation because students felt more involved with what they had produced and their own improvement processes (self-assessment and feedback) but also with those of their peers (peer assessment), d) collaborative and supportive work among peers. On this last point, this meant students respected different points of view, logical reasoning and argumentative abilities, as well as the socio-cognitive processes teachers led when they were in groups and had identified socio-cognitive conflicts.

There is no doubt that the benefits to student learning processes that were identified, whether specific or general, were closely related to the teachers' own awareness of their teaching, giving new meaning to the small, daily actions they undertook and, in particular, to the teachers' changing position or role. As one teacher stated "(...) I feel that the greatest challenge in the

classroom is to offer each student something that allows cognitive progress to occur, in line their needs and abilities” (Teacher 16). Several teachers agreed that the core issue was “learning to listen more” to the students and to group interactions.

b) Main benefits of using formative assessment practices for teachers

As was outlined above, formative assessment practices are grouped around: learning intentions and achievement criteria, using questions and discussions in the classroom, feedback, self-assessment and peer assessment. Three additional practices were added to these: coexistence in the classroom and school, observations and recording follow-up by teachers, and student portfolios to record progress in their learning trajectories.

Teacher awareness about the small assessment practices they used in teaching allowed them to recognise their own expertise and consolidate their knowledge. At the same time, sharing their knowledge and the difficulties they faced with their peers allowed them to grow professionally. These elements enhanced the educators’ analytical and reflective thinking around their pedagogical work. They also stimulated the creative development of new ways of teaching as well learning for their students, as was mentioned by several teachers.

The changes to the teachers’ position and their self-awareness were also reflected at the operational level. Formative assessment modalities were recorded in planning and teaching work. This allowed them to carry out more targeted interventions, tailored to the needs of each individual and the group. Assessments were included when planning didactic units or developing projects. These were not seen as independent from teaching and student learning processes but as part of them. They were considered to be valuable as they enabled timely and precise feedback.

c) Key characteristics of professional learning that support teacher formative assessment practices

As previously explained, in the education sector in Uruguay there are two concurrent assessment modalities: external and standardised, and procedural and formative assessments developed by teachers. Unlike for secondary and technical education, since the previous national government (2015-2019) there have been efforts made in early childhood and primary education to promote formative assessment. This was done by the system’s technical authorities, as well as through in-service training courses. These efforts, as well as the fact that a hundred percent of teachers in early childhood and primary education are qualified, have allowed teachers to be more receptive to pedagogical improvement processes and to see themselves as education professionals.

It is important to note that the aforementioned practices are now challenged because of the new political authorities’ (2020-2024)¹⁶ decision to see education as secondary and because of the self-proclaimed “education transformation” promoted by them for teachers. In speeches made by the authorities, teachers are seen as implementers who must implement what experts and technical officers have designed. At the same time, new figures have been created, such as “mentors”, “facilitators”, etc., who must “guide” teachers having to apply the new educational guidelines.

¹⁶ See table 8.

In the context of this clash, the work tool of the circles enabled teachers to have enough space and time for meetings, discussions, exchanges and to be enriched from being with peers. This motivated them and enhanced teacher professionalisation.

How the work was framed and what occurred in the process began by recognising teacher knowledge. This not only motivated them but also increased the levels of self and collective reflection and critical analysis. Although described in different terms, all the teachers who completed the work in the circles agreed on this aspect. This shows the need, importance and benefits of collective work among teachers for professional growth.

d) Key obstacles to effective formative assessment for teachers and students and strategies, if any, to address them

The obstacles teachers identified throughout the work fall into three different categories: working conditions, system bureaucracy, “integration” without assistance.

Working conditions:

Deteriorating working conditions, especially regarding teacher salaries in the last four years, has led many teachers to have multiple jobs or work double shifts in two public schools or in a public and private school. It is clear that excessive workloads and the wearing down of teachers due to the increased demands of teaching have led to “fatigue”, stress and illness for many teachers. More specifically, teachers in the circles stated there was “lack of time to study”, “exchange with colleagues”, or “continue training”.

Teachers were also critical of the lack of spaces in schools and time to exchange, reflect and think with their colleagues about the “real problems we experience in schools”. Another criticism raised by teachers was how sterile the courses dictated by the system authorities were, aimed at introducing the new guidelines of the education transformation.

System bureaucracy

As regards this last criticism, teachers also stated that the so-called “education transformation”¹⁷ meant the amount of paperwork (completing forms, administrative checks, etc.) had significantly increased. This made them feel as though they were wasting time and energy as they did not see its pedagogical value.

“Integration” without assistance

At classroom level, several teachers said that rather than the number of children per class, one difficulty regarding teaching and formative assessment was the fact that students with different abilities were integrated into mainstream schools. In most cases, there was no teaching assistant or pedagogical or therapeutic assistant who could work with the classroom teacher to provide the individual attention these children required. Although teachers agreed with integration policies, they disagreed on the ways they were being implemented since they were not supported in their day-to-day work. In this regard, one teacher stated:

¹⁷ The current state of play of education in the country: After the pandemic and without a process of collective analysis and reflection, the education authorities imposed an “Education Transformation”, both for the curriculum and at institutional level, which teachers and trade union groups reject. The imposed transformation requires teachers to attend courses and “training” outside school hours. This, combined with new forms of planning, supervision and wage cuts, have created significant discontent amongst teachers.

“In this respect, working with students with disabilities or who have a particularly noticeable condition becomes a source of concern and something you focus on, given that in the classroom it is not always possible to properly address their needs or offer experiences that challenge them cognitively and allow them to learn” (Teacher 12).

Strategies

Regarding the lack of time and space for teachers to work collectively, we believe the union and the educational magazine *Quehacer Educativo*, could create more opportunities for this kind of work, to record and disseminate these kinds of experiences to stimulate pedagogical reflection. Spaces should be provided to acknowledge teachers, thus enabling teacher voices and knowledge to circulate.

As regards the difficulties of providing tailored teaching to children with special educational needs, we must ask for assistance and support from teaching assistants to work with classroom teachers. However, it is worth pointing out that currently teachers do challenge their creativity and devise various strategies to respond to the demands of these children. In some cases, teachers prepare special materials for them, include them in smaller groups with children who can support and lead tasks and work with them. Teachers also turn to trainees or community teachers, etc. Teachers have been developing support and teaching strategies for children with special educational needs based on each child’s needs and in line with resources available in their school or neighbouring schools.

Next Steps for the Teacher-Led Learning and Thinking Circles

a) Next steps and priorities in Uruguay regarding professional development and the use of teacher-led formative assessment based on the experiences and lessons learned in this project.

We believe the most appropriate priorities centre around creating spaces in schools for teachers to exchange experiences and knowledge. These could be strengthened by inviting other professionals and by writing about teaching experiences. The union could partner with the University of the Republic and promote opportunities for debate and pedagogical output. For this year, the following specific activities have been proposed:

Teachers participating in the circles:

- Increase the number of exchanges among participating teachers and their colleagues within the school environment. Some of them started this in 2023; others have changed school and are learning about and adapting to the new school. These teachers will analyse how receptive school management and staff would be to this work.
- The two supervising teachers¹⁸ have planned to continue disseminating the work and involving student teachers in the planning and implementation of teaching that integrates formative assessment as a central tool.

¹⁸ This means that the teacher has trainee teachers practising teaching in the classroom on a daily basis.

These activities were suggested by teachers who themselves participated in the circles. Regarding the first activity, one teacher stated:

“At school level, I believe one of the challenges is to share valuable didactic experiences on the use of formative assessment, given that there is hardly any time to coordinate or meet for learning from what happens in other classrooms” (Teacher 1).

One of the supervising teachers stated:

“My school is practical. The challenge I face is to put forward thoughts, tasks and assignments to student teachers that allow them to teach and create a teaching role based on a social commitment and academic rigor” (Teacher 4).

At central level:

- Replan Circle C in the first term of 2024 and develop the work plan. The circle coordinators were two teachers who participated in the circles, one from Circle A, the other from Circle B. One of these teachers is from Montevideo and the other lives inland. The circle has been planned in such a way that it has time to meet and it will be split into two subgroups based on the teachers' realities and needs.
- A series of audiovisual recordings of testimonials from participating teachers have already been made. The plan is to develop materials that can be disseminated on FUM-TEP social networks to make the work known.
- Preparation of a second article for the FUM-TEP's Quehacer Educativo magazine.
- Presentation of the work done in the circles in a meeting with representatives from all branches of the country once the FUM-TEP Congress is over, which will take place in May.
- Presentation of the work in Quehacer Educativo magazine.
- Presentation of the work at international level in Education International activities.

b) Recommendations from union representatives for the dissemination of Teacher-Led Learning and Thinking Circles in Uruguay.

We believe that recommendations to FUM-TEP colleagues could cover three areas: a) establish spaces in the union, and in coordination with Quehacer Educativo, for pedagogical reflection that incorporate a formative assessment component. As mentioned above, these spaces should prioritise recognising teacher professionalism, their voices and disseminating their knowledge; b) encourage teachers to write down experiences and publish these in the union magazine; c) strengthen cooperation with the University of the Republic to increase exchanges of knowledge and for mutual enrichment.

Conclusions drawn or suggestions for other countries seeking to implement Teacher-Led Learning and Thinking Circles

Based on the work carried out in the circles, there are three key elements to consider:

- Provide specific spaces and times for listening, discussing, analysing and reflecting on the real difficulties experienced every day in classrooms, respecting the languages and idiosyncrasies of each country and region.
- Recognise teachers have practical and theoretical knowledge and analytical perspectives.
- Listen to them and promote conceptual analyses and reflections based on their experiences as teachers.

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Appendixes:

Appendix 1: Example of online formative assessment activity

Maths assessment activity 2022:

This is the MAT2984 “Luján Toll” activity. It aims to apply properties of the decimal numbering system in calculation strategies. It presents a problem in a non-mathematical context. The context allows for multiplication and can be solved with repeated addition, so that different kinds knowledge and several problem-solving strategies can be used.

Table 13: Example of maths assessment tool MAT2984 “Luján Toll”:

Code	MAT2984	Title	Luján Toll
State	At the bank	Subject	Mathematics
Date	22/03/2022	Domain	Numbers
Type	Multiple choices	Content	Calculations
Confidentiality	Available for teachers	Sub-content	Properties of calculations
Difficulty		Competence	Apply concepts
Template		Grade	Primary 3
Objective	Apply properties of the decimal numbering system in the calculations		

Source: Compiled by authors based on Mathematics MAT2984 “Luján Toll”

Appendix 2: Images of formative assessment

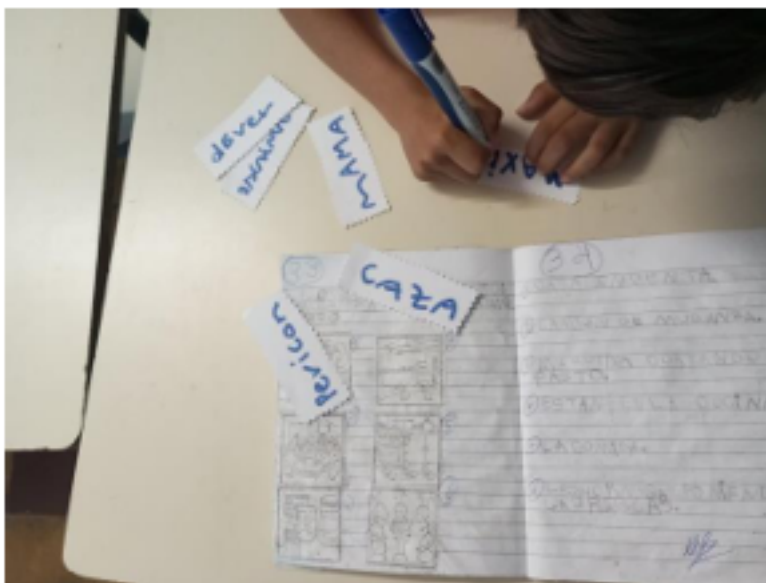
A) Collaborative work: Pre-primary level, 5 years in a public school



B) Teamwork: "Group rewriting after self, peer assessment and group discussion"



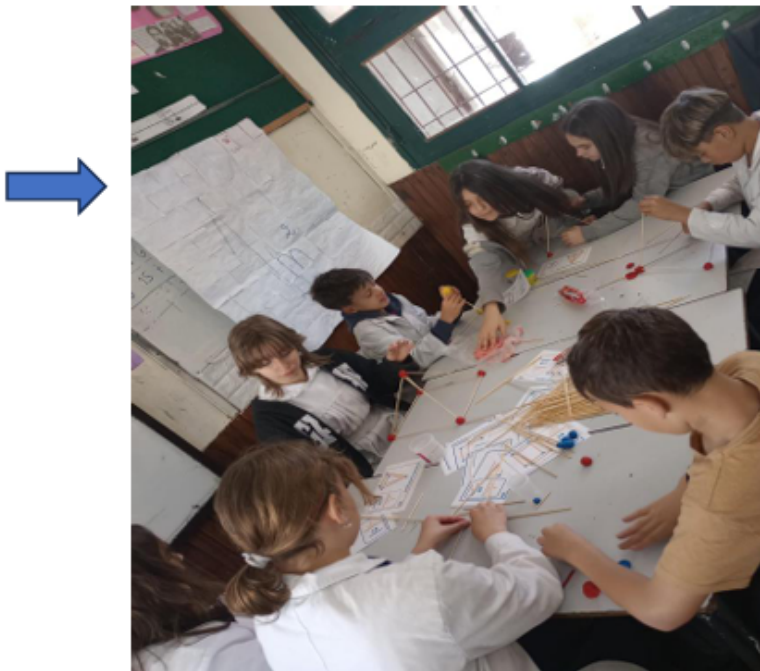
C) Individual rewriting work



D) Work with rubric:
Maths task in year 6

Criterios	Rendimiento		
	3	2	1
Identificar qué es un poliedro y un no poliedro.	Clasifico las figuras del espacio en poliedros y no poliedros identificando sus características.	Clasifico las figuras del espacio en poliedros y no poliedros pero en algunos ejemplos tengo dudas.	No logro identificar cuándo una figura del espacio es un poliedro o un no poliedro.
Determinar los elementos de un poliedro: caras, aristas y vértices.	Identifico los elementos de un poliedro determinando con precisión su número de caras, aristas y vértices.	Identifico los elementos de un poliedro pero en ocasiones no determino con exactitud su número de caras, aristas y vértices.	No logro determinar los elementos de un poliedro.

E) Work in subgroups





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Education International
Internationale de l'Éducation
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Head office

15 Boulevard Bischoffsheim
1000 Brussels, Belgium
Tel +32-2 224 0611
headoffice@ei-ie.org

www.ei-ie.org
[#unite4ed](https://twitter.com/unite4ed)

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