

# **Do peer assessment checklists have an impact on pupils writing?**

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## ***Rationale***

Assessment is a critical part of the school culture and reinforces Curriculum for Excellence (Scottish Government, 2011). Curriculum for Excellence allows learners to grow in experience and become confident individuals, responsible citizens, effective contributors and successful learners. Teachers are required to use various forms of assessment to ensure that pupils are successful in their learning and are achieving their learning objectives. Black and William (2009) have developed research focused on the role of formative assessment and the effect it has on pupil's progress. The research concluded that in order to be effective formative feedback should be ongoing in order for pupils to evaluate their own learning and develop their knowledge and skills. They emphasise, for this to be effective, pupils must be involved in the process, which would allow the teacher to adjust and improve their teaching strategies responsively.

The use of formative assessment strategies is the basis for supporting pupils' development. The idea that pupils' development can be supported using formative assessment is visible through peer-assessment. This approach promotes co-operative learning in order to assess each other, showing support, giving advice and praise referring to the success criteria (Black and William, 1998). Boon (2013) suggested that for peer-assessment to be effective, children must acquire the relevant skills and understanding of how to assess. Peer-assessment provides opportunities to develop a variety of social and communication skills such as; talking and listening, problem solving and working in collaboration with others. This is also supported within the Scottish Government document, Building the Curriculum 5, which explains the importance of assessing personal qualities and skills such as, creative thinking, making informed decisions and working in partnerships. Simpson (2001) agrees that children need more than knowledge and they should have the opportunity to develop skills they will require throughout their life.

## ***Aim***

The aim of this enquiry is to explore the use of a peer assessment checklist to improve the quality of feedback and reduce errors in children's writing.

## ***Methodology***

As a Primary 2 teacher I have strived to embed the skills and knowledge within children to assess their learning and identified areas for improvement – whilst taking responsibility for their own learning. In order to promote this at the beginning of first level, I developed a visual checklist which was differentiated to meet the needs of individual learners.

The enquiry was managed over a four-week period in a Primary 2 class. The children were familiar with the concepts of self and peer-assessment at a basic level. Prior to this enquiry I had applied the school approach to formative assessment which is two stars and a wish. However, I felt that a more visual and practical resource was more valuable in the infant class to support the quality of formative assessment. During the enquiry there were three methods of collecting the data. This included; checklists, class discussions and observations.

Using the first level core writing targets as a basis I researched and created a visual checklist (See Appendix 1). I demonstrated the use of the checklist regularly using a template of the checklist on the smartboard. I displayed the checklist and referred to this throughout the lessons. I used the think, pair and share strategy and encouraged the children to use the checklist and report back to the rest of the class. I also used this to evaluate the children's understanding of using the checklist and the quality of the feedback they were giving to their peers. Over the course of the four weeks I then began to use peer-assessment, with the use of the checklists, into a variety of different tasks including daily writing and taught writing which gave the children the responsibility of using the checklist with their peers.

The children were familiar with two stars and a wish, so I incorporated aspects of this into the checklist. The children would colour which face they thought was best for their peer. The faces said Great job or Needs a little work. I felt that the children would benefit more from the softer approach to allow them to assess their peers work but not be disheartened if there were areas to work on. Clark (2015) suggests that peer-assessment allows pupils to show their knowledge and understanding. I feel that the use of this checklist allowed me to continuously assess this.

#### Class Discussions

Prior to the introduction of the visual checklist, I came up with some questions to discuss as a class to establish a starting point. This was completed this during an interactive talking and listening session as a class. This allowed the children to think about their writing targets and share their ideas and opinions in an open way, knowing their views and opinions were respected. At the end of the study we had a class discussion where I showed them some samples of their work. They made comparisons of tasks they had completed before we used the checklist and tasks since then. The children were asked to think of examples of a task when they felt peer-assessment had helped them. Some children found this difficult, however some showed a great understanding stating that their peer had reminded them to use a capital letter or finger spaces.

#### Observations

I have recorded a variety of statements from the children during peer-assessment whilst using the checklists. I also made observations using think, pair and share reports and through informal observations when the checklists were used.

### ***Findings***

#### Class Discussion Results

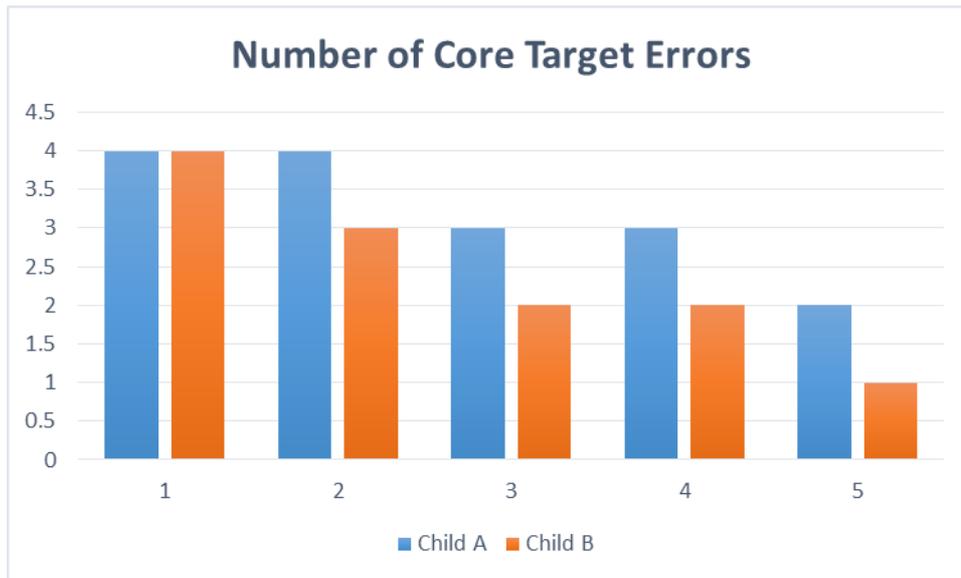
To examine the class discussion results I evaluated my findings from before the checklist was used and after. I used spider diagrams to organise what was said by the children and I compared these. The results made suggestions that the children felt the discussions gave them

confidence in meeting their core writing targets. The children said that they felt the checklist and feedback from their peers supported their learning.

#### Observation Results:

Through my observations I was able to conclude that:

- Throughout the five-week period there was a reduction in the amount of errors in children's writing through the use of the checklists. The graph below shows a comparison between two children. It is clear to see that the number of core target errors has reduced whilst using the checklists.



- The quality of verbal feedback the children gave their peers also progressed.
- Children encouraged their peers through clear feedback.
- Some children still required support to complete the peer-assessment checklist efficiently.

Comments from children:

- *I can use the checklist to help me with my writing.*
- *I can tell my friend what they need to do to make it better.*
- *I like when my friend helps me.*
- *We all need a little work with our targets and that's okay.*
- *It's okay that you forgot a capital letter we all forget sometimes.*

I noted the use of these checklists and examined the children's work over the duration of this enquiry. Generally, the most apparent impact for all learners from using the checklist was on their presentation. The children seemed to take more care in their work. On the whole, the group of focus children gave meaningful feedback of their partners work and worked on the feedback given by their peers over the four weeks. The children appeared to benefit from the aspect of responsibility when writing their partner's checklist and took their task seriously, this was apparent by their use of positive praise to one another.

## ***Conclusion***

Through the evidence I have collected during this process it is clear that the introduction of a checklist for peer-assessment has had a positive impact on the children in my class. The children have benefited from this enquiry and this is evident in their daily writing, taught writing and writing across the curriculum. The children can talk about their targets now and what they need to do to be successful in their learning. The quality of feedback is excellent for children at this level.

## ***Implications for Future Practice***

I have discussed the checklist with colleagues and have shared observations with them. I am eager to increase the use of checklists in other areas of the curriculum to reinforce teaching and learning at first level. I will continue to ensure the checklists are differentiated and develop the specific success criteria. This has been an important tool and has improved the learning of the children in the classroom. This study has had a great effect on how I carry out tasks which are peer-assessed across the curriculum.

## ***Appendix 1***

# Peer Assessment Checklist

Read your partner's writing.  
Colour in the circle that best fits.



= Great job!



= Needs a little work

All sentences begin with capital letters



All sentences end with punctuation.



There are spaces between words.



The very best handwriting was used.



I understood what I read.



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