What happens when exit passes are used as a self-assessment tool?

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Rationale
High quality assessment is imperative to successful learning and teaching. Formative assessment strategies, in particular, have been found to have a hugely positive impact on children's learning, as a result of teachers' planning assessment alongside lessons and using results to inform future planning (Wiliam, 2011).

Self-assessment is an aspect of classroom practice that is beneficial to both teachers and learners. This is supported by (Black and Wiliam, 1998), who explain that in order for teachers to adequately support learners, the learners must accept responsibility for part of their own learning, including making the teacher aware of how they are coping with their tasks and what aspects they are finding challenging. Exit passes are a means of self-assessment that could successfully support children's development of effective and accurate self-evaluation skills. During this investigation, evidence was gathered and compared across a variety of stages and ability level, from Primary 2 to S1. The evidence was then critically reflected upon and the desired outcome of improvement of learning experiences for children in our care would be reached. Donaldson (2011) urges that practitioner enquiry is 'the way forward' in improving both teacher learning and pupil experiences by utilising evidenced-based research, therefore this approach is an excellent way to investigate exit passes being used as a self-assessment tool.

Aims
The aim of this inquiry was to explore the use of exit passes and view the children's feedback on their performance. This will help to adjust future lessons to meet the children's needs and abilities. In order to do so, the children were encouraged to use exit passes to assess their learning at the end of literacy lessons and identify areas for improvement during subsequent lessons.

Methodology
The enquiry was carried out over a 5-week period with a composite class of 10 Primary 2 children and 12 Primary 3 children. Although all of the children participated in the completing exit passes to conclude literacy lessons, the results of the Primary 2 children were chosen to be focussed on for the study.

This cohort consisted of several children who require additional support, which was provided both throughout the lesson and whilst exit passes were being completed. Literacy was chosen as the curricular focus for the enquiry due to an interest in enhancing understanding of the North Lanarkshire Active Literacy Programme and contributing towards school improvement plans.

The children were made aware of how to use the exit passes prior to the intervention commencing and an example of a piece of work and exit pass was displayed clearly on a wall, alongside a word-bank of phrases they children could make use of if they wished.

Filling out the exit pass provided the children with an opportunity to reflect on their learning for that session and let the teacher know how they felt honestly and anonymously.

During the research, the children would be asked to write a comment in response to the following sentence openers: "I think I was good at" and "I think I could get better at". The children would also be given the opportunity to colour in a traffic light, determining how well they felt they achieved during the lesson; red showing that they felt they had no understanding of the concept thus they were unable to meet the Learning Intention and Success Criteria, yellow showing that they felt they had some understanding and partly met the Learning Intention and Success Criteria and green indicating that they were confident of the concept and felt they had fully met the Learning Intention and Success Criteria.

Children would complete an exit pass at the end of each lesson, the results were then recorded and a discussion was had with the children. The results were then used to inform future planning as advised by Wiliam (2011). At the end of the 5 weeks, the children participated in a reflective discussion about the use of exit passes. The children contributed honest feedback to the use of exit passes after literacy lessons, most enjoyed the activity and found it useful. However, some children said they would have preferred to talk about what they were good and not so good at after writing a lot during the lesson itself.

Findings
Through analysis of the evidence gathered it was discovered that in the class children found the exit passes a fun and effective way to communicate with the teacher and reflect on their learning. The responses to the exit passes reflected how the children felt they understood and completed the tasks and were varied, indicating that the children had taken time to think about the lesson and reflect on it before filling out their exit passes honestly.

The exit passes identified clear progression in learning for the majority of children. Children were able to write what they had been successful in during the lesson and identify areas to improve on during subsequent lessons. Many comments showed that the children had worked on previously identified areas for improvement and children had reflected honestly on their learning.

Some of the children identified the following strengths:

- "I read well with my group."
- "Finishing all of my jobs and adding lots of detail to my things (answers)"
- "My handwriting was neat and tidy and better than the last time"
- "I followed along when reading in my group."

Children were often more confident at identifying areas for improvement at the end of lessons and completed this section of the exit pass first. However, few children linked their area for improvement to the success criteria and responses were often focussed on presentation and concentration:

- "Pay atenchson (attention) to my work."
- "Not getting distracted."
- "My writing got messy at the end."

One thing that was evident from using exit passes over the five-week period was that the children were honest in their evaluations. When checking the children's evaluation against their piece of work, most evaluations reflected their performance.

Conclusions
From the findings, it can be concluded that exit passes are an effective tool for self-assessment in the classroom. They give children an opportunity to reflect on their performance and think about their strengths and areas for development. This then allows teachers to adapt planning, as the exit passes indicate areas that need to be revised or any areas which the children have coped well with and therefore, can move on from.

This process did seem to help the children develop their confidence and helped them to work on identifying their strengths and areas for development. However, this is something which they will still need to work on and continue to develop as exit passes are used for longer periods of time. In addition to this, it can be suggested that by implementing a more structured means for self-assessment at the end of lessons in the form of Exit Passes, learners seem more confident in their progress and achievement.

Implications for Future Practice
Moving forward with the development of self-assessment skills, learners would become more familiar with the use of exit passes and take greater ownership of their learning if they were used over a lengthier time period. This will ensure that learners are reflecting on the intended learning intention in the focus curricular area. In future, children's responses may be more focussed to success criteria if the questions on each exit pass are directly linked to the success criteria of each lesson.

Bibliography
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