

Using traffic lights as a form of self-assessment to inform next steps in learning and teaching.

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Rationale

Formative assessment, also termed assessment *for* learning, is evidently valued by many theorists and practitioners as a tool to support pupils' progression. Many have contributed and critiqued a variety of strategies for use in the classroom (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Black & Wiliam, 2004; Harris, 2007; Bryce, 2013). Building the Curriculum 5 recognises one purpose of assessment to “inform future improvements in learning and teaching (The Scottish Government, 2010, p. 10).

The specific reasoning behind this particular enquiry is based on a personal interest which has been sparked by reading the work of Clarke (2005). Clarke states that self-assessment not only enables learners to critique their work more freely but when implemented consistently, can provide them with the skills to identify their next steps in learning and ultimately enable children to be leaders of their own learning. Additionally, taking ownership of their learning permits students to become self-regulating and autonomous, which is essential to intrinsic motivation and progression. In setting their own targets, pupils are afforded this opportunity of responsibility and adults become the guardians needed for progression from the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978).

In both Harris' and Wylie & Lyons' articles on implementation of formative assessment principles, they acknowledge the need for initial teacher guidance and support in developing pupils' target setting skills (Harris 2007, Wylie and Lyon 2015). To do this, learning intentions should be shared or co-constructed with clarity and focus on what learning should be achieved by the end of the activity. This is supported by Cowie's findings that students who focus on learning goals, rather than performance goals, viewed assessment for learning as the joint

responsibility of teacher and pupil (Cowie 2005). The following section will outline the way in which I have used this to inform my own practice throughout this enquiry.

Aims

- 1. To measure the effectiveness of self-assessment on learning and next steps for improvement.*
- 2. To evaluate if self-assessment enables children to become positive and active contributors by taking ownership of their own learning.*

Methodology

The approach taken was the introduction of a traffic light system in pupils' math jotters whereby they would traffic light their work according to how they found the particular exercise. The enquiry was conducted over a four week period and implemented with the whole class. There was a group of twelve learners, from the same Maths group, who were identified as a focus group. This enabled a consistency of responses, as well as a manageable volume of data collection.

Method 1- Self assessment exit pass

During each week of data collection, pupils would review the success criteria for the particular focus of learning and were asked to use the AiFL method of 'traffic lighting' to self assess their work against the success criteria. They used an exit pass to to traffic light their work, as well as inform their next steps in learning (figure 1).

Success Criteria			
I can use concrete materials to find fractions of an amount.			
I can use division strategies to help me calculate word problems.			

Write down two things that you feel have been successful in today's lesson.

- 1.
- 2.

What is your next step?



Figure 1: Self-assessment exit pass

Method 2- Comparing assessment accuracy

In order to gather results of whether or not pupils were acting on their own target setting, a simple table was used (figure 2). Each pupil was given time at the beginning of the lesson to address their previous target, whether that be through additional practice of a concept or correcting previous mistakes.

Method 3- Informal verbal feedback

Informal verbal feedback was gathered on whether pupils felt assessing their own work was benefiting them. This was done through group discussions with the target group, as well as individual conversations with pupils.

Findings

As a result of the implementation of the self-assessment exit slip, it was evident that learners not only became more accurate in their next steps, but were increasingly proactive in using their next steps to inform their learning. Initially, learners struggled to create the next step for their learning.

The following tables highlight the progression over the four-week period.

Date: 20.1.20	Yes	No
Used their next steps	2 children	10 children
Self-assessment was accurate	3 children	9 children

Date: 17.4.20	Yes	No
Used their next steps	11 children	12 children
Self-assessment was accurate	9 children	3 children

Figure 2: Assessment accuracy table

Wylie & Lyon (2015) explain one issue is that “students often have incorrect conceptions of what they are learning, why they are learning it and what quality work looks like (Wylie & Lyon, 2015, p. 146). In the first few weeks, learners lacked confidence in being able to identify where they struggled to meet the success criteria, as illustrated in figure 2. An additional input with the whole class addressed this through watching ‘Austin’s Butterfly’ - a video which aims to teach children how to be critical when providing feedback to peers. Although the video focuses on peer feedback, this was effective in enabling learners to provide a constructive next step for their own learning.

As the weeks progressed, most children within the group became more reflective with their work and used their next step to progress their learning and as a personal target for the following session. Pupils were encouraged to complete the self-assessment slip throughout the lesson, as to

enable them to be proactive in identifying and recording anything that they were struggling with. Pupils appeared to find this easier to complete throughout, as opposed to at the end of the lesson and their targets became more specific. This made the teacher reconsider the idea of naming the self-assessment slip an '**exit**' slip as this suggests that pupils are only encouraged to reflect on their learning at the end of the lesson, as opposed to throughout.

Through individual discussion with pupils, it was evident that they were developing the skills to be specific about their learning. The teacher and class discussed the assessment slips as a whole group in the final week. Some pupils were able to recall their learning and targets from the first session and overall, a positive consensus was reached regarding the process of target setting, with one particular pupil explaining that they enjoyed being able to reflect on their progression. It was evident that they were beginning to identify their own success through their target setting.

Conclusion

Despite the short time in which this enquiry was implemented, the results show an overall improvement and understanding of self-assessment and the benefits of this. The results indicate that learners developed the skills to be able to honestly reflect upon their learning and set specific targets. However, it is important to note that not all pupils engaged with reflecting on their learning and setting targets. In order to be formative, feedback on pupils' work must go beyond a summative evaluation or grade. Instead, it should identify a gap in pupils' work and the action needed to close this gap thereby moving learning forward (Harris 2007).

It became apparent that often when providing learners who were less likely to engage in self-reflection with informal verbal feedback, they were able to discuss their learning and identify difficulties. The teacher noted that through discussion with these pupils, it became apparent that the process of recording their learning was the issue. Therefore, it is important to note that other methods of self-assessment might have engaged those learners who did not fully participate.

Implications for Future Practice

As a result of the overall success of this enquiry, the teacher will continue to implement self-assessment methods within the classroom. If children can develop the skills to critically reflect upon their learning, this will in turn provide valuable feedback to myself which will enable me to improve on my own teaching. The teacher will ensure that different methods are encouraged for those learners who struggle with recording information, providing them with a more manageable solution to a written record. Additionally, learners will be encouraged to self-assess throughout the lesson, as opposed to restricting this to the plenary. Learners will be given the time to share and celebrate their recognised successes with peers. The teacher will share the results of this enquiry with colleagues within their school, as well as any future successes or challenges regarding self-assessment.

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