

Using Traffic Lights in the Class Room

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Rationale

Research on formative assessment and feedback suggests that pupils should have a proactive rather than a reactive role in generating and using feedback (Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). This allows them time to reflect on their learning and makes them more aware of not only what they learn, but how they learn and what helps them learn.

In turn, this allows teachers to use the feedback to inform their planning and improve their teaching.

The enquiry group agreed that this would be a beneficial enquiry in both primary and secondary schools to evaluate the impact of using self-assessment in the classroom. The traffic light strategy was adapted for each age and stage ranging from traffic light colours to written comments in the form of a star and a wish. This enquiry also links to the Scottish Government's Assessment Framework which aspires to "put the learner at the centre of education and fully involve them in deciding what needs to be done next" in their learning.

Aims

The aim of this enquiry was to investigate the impact of using traffic lights as a self-assessment tool in the classroom.

Methodology

The enquiry was conducted over four weeks with a Primary 2/3 class of 23 pupils with a broad range of abilities and support needs. It was undertaken during literacy lessons and data was collected and collated on a weekly basis. Although all children in the class use self-assessment, a focus group of six children were chosen who would benefit most from this enquiry. The focus group consisted of three able and three more able pupils who were working at first level.

Prior to the first week of the enquiry a baseline was noted to evaluate the accuracy and quality of self-assessment from the focus group, in relation to their understanding of their work.

Throughout the enquiry pupils used traffic light pyramids during the lesson to self-assess ongoing work and a star and a wish to self-assess completed work at the end of a lesson. This allowed targeted support during lessons and also allowed pupils and class teacher to track progress, targets and inform planning.

Traffic light Pyramids (see Fig 1.)

This self-assessment strategy was implemented to enable pupils to show their understanding of their task. Pyramids were available in table organisers for pupils to use, displaying a green, amber or red side facing them.

After their initial introduction, pupils used the pyramids displaying green for confident, amber showing they required help but were making an attempt or red showing they required support as they could not make any effort at the task.

The teacher was then able to identify pupils who required immediate help during the lesson. The frequency of colours shown by pupils was observed and the data noted by class teacher at the end of the lesson.

Star and a Wish (see Fig 2.)

This self-assessment strategy was used at the end of the lesson. After completing their work, children self-assessed by using a star and a wish. The star was accompanied by a positive comment to demonstrate an area of their work the children felt confident in, for example, good use of punctuation. A wish was accompanied by a comment to include a next step to improve their work.

The teacher noted daily the consistency and honesty between the comments and evidence from marking, to check for accurate self-assessment and appropriate next steps. The data collected from both strategies used was collated weekly.

Fig. 1.

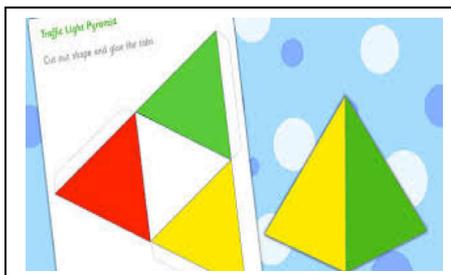
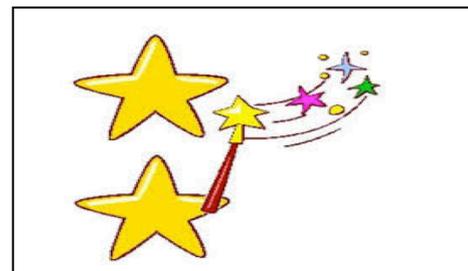


Fig.2.



Findings

The findings of this enquiry were gathered from observations of class teacher from pupils' actions, dialogue with the pupils, data collected from jotters and feedback from a questionnaire.

Traffic light Pyramids

In the first week, the traffic light pyramids were very successful. Children were keen to use them for immediate attention from the class teacher. They displayed all three colours as required and they allowed pupils and the class teacher to gauge how well the class were coping with the task.

During the following weeks the use of the pyramids diminished and children used them to show amber or red only. They began to be used to get the teachers attention rather than a self-assessment tool. In the last week, the children would often leave the pyramids on their desk showing red, even when they had been supported and were working well on their task. Data was taken of the number of pupils selecting colours over the 4 weeks (see Fig. 3).

Fig.3

Week	Green	Amber	Red
1	13	9	11
2	18	12	13
3	8	3	6
4	4	7	7

Star and a Wish

The findings revealed that a star and a wish had a significant impact on raising the quality and accuracy of children's self-assessment, and further, facilitated more effective next steps and improved work. The data was collated after each literacy lesson and the accuracy of self-assessment in relation to understanding of work was gauged by class teacher on a scale of 1-5 (5 being the most accurate).

Even when tasks were incomplete, children were able to use a star and a wish to identify the reason why the task was unfinished and this was used by class teacher to plan further input or provide targeted support.

The findings also showed that children were better linking their self-assessment to the success criteria and in turn developing thinking in relation to what they were learning and if they had fulfilled their learning intention during that class.

Fig. 4



Questionnaire

At the end of the enquiry, 17 pupils completed a questionnaire and were asked to comment on the use of the traffic light pyramid and a star and a wish (see Fig. 5).

Fig. 5

Self-Assessment Questionnaire P2/3

1. Do you like using the Traffic Light Pyramids? yes/no
 2. Do you think the Traffic Light Pyramids improved your learning? Why?
 3. Do you like using a Star and a Wish? yes/no
 4. Do you think a Star and a Wish improved your learning? Why?
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In response to question two, most pupils agreed that they forgot to use the traffic light pyramids as the weeks progressed. Some responses were:

“I got bored using the pyramid.”

“I just ended up putting my hand up when I didn’t understand.”

This concurs with class teacher observations that use of the pyramids dropped over time and had little impact on improving understanding.

In response to question three, of the 17 pupils questioned, 16 of them said that they like using a Star and a Wish and 17 agreed that this type of self-assessment improved their learning and informed their next steps. Some responses were:

“I like a star and wish because it makes me think about what I need to do to make my work better.”

“I use the star to say what I have done well in my work.”

“The star and the wish makes helps me show my teacher what I can’t do very well. I know I need to work on this. It shows her what I am confident with too.”

This supports class teacher evaluations of improvement in quality and accuracy in self-assessment of understanding and positive impact on further learning.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the use of self-assessment star and wish has had a significant impact on the focus group and within the whole class. Findings show that this has been an effective form of self-assessment and has improved pupil understanding and next steps.

The only drawback to the star and wish is the reliance on enthusiastic participation by the pupils. One of the pupils in the class did not like the star and wish and jotter comments written by them were poor and offered no proper self-assessment of understanding.

Traffic light pyramids were unsuccessful as the pupils resulted in using them to only get the teachers attention for things other than self-assessment.

Implications for Future Practice

It became apparent over the course of the enquiry that a star and a wish could be used in class as a positive and worthwhile means of self-assessment. When the enquiry was completed, the children continued to use this and maintained a good standard of meaningful self-assessment of their understanding and to inform their next steps in learning.

The use of the traffic light pyramids was stopped as it was felt they had no significant impact on, and added no value to, the children’s self-assessment.

Implications for future practice would be to continue the use of a star and a wish for self-assessment and promote its use in other curricular areas, such as numeracy.

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