

What happens when I use peer assessment in the classroom?

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Rationale

The Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) outlines the importance of formative assessment to support and improve learning. Assessment should be subjected to careful evaluation in order to review learning and identify ways to improve (Scottish Government, 2010). Formative assessment enables pupils to reflect on their learning and respond to this by understanding how to improve. This can take the form of teacher, self or peer assessment. Currently I implement various assessment strategies in line with school policy. This consists of a daily rotation of teacher, self and peer assessment (TSP cycle). My practitioner enquiry focussed specifically on peer-assessment in literacy (reading) using a green (praise) and red (next step) comment. I chose this line of enquiry as I wished to further develop the knowledge and skills involved in peer assessment. Through peer assessment children can take ownership of learning and set next steps. Peer-assessment involves pupils making judgements about their work against the set success criteria.

Sadler (1989) views formative feedback to consist of three essential components: the desired goal, evidence about current position and an understanding of how to close the gap between the two. This formed an integral aspect of the enquiry.

Aims

Through the enquiry, the intention was to explore the impact peer assessment had in the classroom: specifically through exploring whether or not children could peer assess effectively by providing meaningful feedback using a praise comment and a next steps comment, linked to success criteria. The enquiry then went on to look at whether or not children then used the feedback given by their peer to make improvements to their own work.

Methodology

The enquiry took place over a four week period within a primary 4/5 class during reading lessons. Following the reading lesson, a selected group engaged in peer assessment whilst the other two groups would self-assess or be teacher assessed. The assessment cycle was rotated daily which enabled all pupils to engage in peer assessment. As a result, each group engaged in peer assessment once every week during the four week period.

In order for pupils to peer assess effectively and provide meaningful comments, the learning intention and success criteria were shared and displayed throughout the lesson, so that the pupils could refer to them. It had been noted that pupils could only assess effectively when they were clear about their target and how to achieve it (learning intention and success criteria) and so they knew what learning should be attained. The pupils and I would also develop the success criteria on occasion, which enhanced and demonstrated the children's understanding.

Wiliam (2014) highlights that, in order for pupils to peer assess effectively, they must be trained in peer-assessment in order for them to grasp the purpose and effect on their learning. As a result, I ensured that pupils were aware of how they assessed work using the success criteria from the lesson. Through the process of carrying out peer assessment, pupils internalized the success criteria to provide feedback on a classmate's work. Pupils wrote a

praise comment on how their peer met the success criteria and a next steps comment to identify what could be improved. I noted that some children might have met the success criteria and so, if this was evident, the children would refer to the core literacy targets to review whether the targets had been met.

The four forms of evidence used in the enquiry consisted of a questionnaire (before and after the enquiry), observations and jotter evidence (peer-assessment feedback). At the beginning of the enquiry, the children were provided with a questionnaire consisting of questions and emojis to highlight their thoughts and feelings. This was used to explore the children’s attitudes toward peer assessment, their confidence and if they believed they were peer-assessing effectively in line with the success criteria. After the enquiry, the questionnaire was completed again to highlight any changes.

Findings

When the enquiry was completed, the data was gathered and analysed to understand the impact peer assessment had in class.

Questionnaires

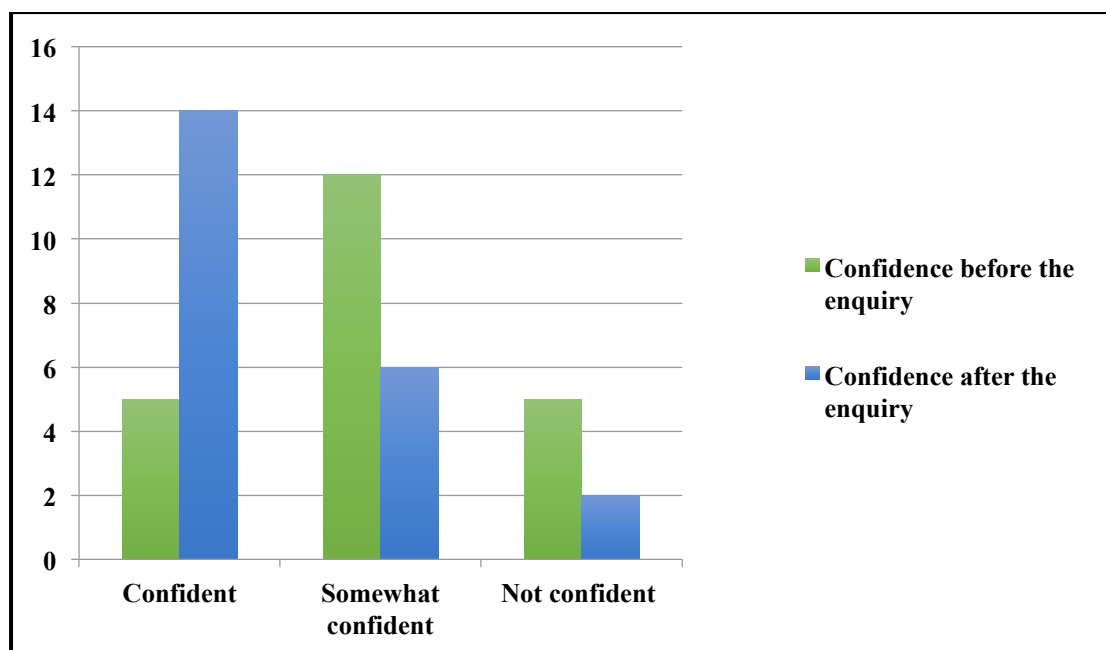
At the beginning of the enquiry, the majority of the class felt somewhat confident regarding peer assessment. By the end of the enquiry, the number of children who felt confident had increased, which showed positive results (see chart below). Through dialogue, pupils identified the positive aspects they enjoyed about peer assessment:

“The red comments (next step comments) help you to know what you can do better.”

“It’s good to peer assess because you can get some good ideas.”

“You can read over somebody’s work and find things they might have missed.”

Chart – Confidence before and after the enquiry



Observations

Initially, I found that more children were inclined to write a comment about their peer's presentation/handwriting and spelling. As the enquiry progressed, the children showed an enhanced understanding of peer assessment and how they would peer-assess effectively using the success criteria. Children shared their peer-assessment feedback comments with the class. This highlighted good practice and other children also learned from this and could implement this the next time they peer assessed. Furthermore, an increase in confidence was observed as children could assess completely independently or fairly independently to provide meaningful feedback.

Jotter Evidence

The children's peer-assessment feedback comments demonstrated that they had used the success criteria to inform their comments. Children evidenced more confidence when they wrote a praise comment to show how their classmate met the success criteria. Through discussions with the whole class, groups and individuals, children were able to feedback how their peer would demonstrate if they met the criteria. However, with regard to next step comments, some children found this difficult if their peer had met the success criteria. In this instance, children were encouraged to refer back to the literacy core targets to review whether or not their classmate had met these.

On some occasions, I did find that selected individuals would require some teacher input to help them to provide meaningful feedback in line with the success criteria. Also, some children would receive the same next step comment on occasions which suggested they had not taken the feedback on board.

Initially, I found that selected children were more inclined to provide feedback which repeated the learning intention or reflected on core targets (praise comment) rather than the success criteria. The repetition of the learning intention demonstrated that the success criteria was not being used to inform the comment. Thus, teacher input was required here to ensure meaningful feedback was received. However, as the enquiry progressed, it became routine for the majority of pupils to use the success criteria.

By the end of the enquiry, it was clear that the process of engaging in peer assessment had a positive impact on learners as they could reflect on the success criteria and review whether or not the success criteria has been met.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the data showed a very positive change in the children's understanding of peer-assessment and their ability to carry out peer-assessment during reading lessons. I noted that the children were very clear in their understanding of the success criteria in reading which lead to meaningful peer-assessment comments. Pupils could comment on how their peer met the success criteria and then, if required, what they could do next time to meet it. However, not all children were completely independent, which is something I would like to continue to develop during reading lessons. I also need to ensure that children take time to review previous feedback comments.

Implications for Future Practice

I have become more aware of the impact of sharing and displaying the learning intention and success criteria to ensure children understand the learning and expectations. It is also important for children to review their previous targets so that they can ensure they are developing the identified area. The findings of the enquiry have illustrated the impact of sharing and displaying the learning intentions and success criteria. As a result this has been

implemented in other areas of learning. This method of peer-assessment will continue to be implemented in line with school policy.

Bibliography

Wiliam, D. (2014) *Formative Assessment and Contingency in the Regulation of Learning Processes*. London: University of London.

Sadler, D.R. (1989) *Formative Assessment and the Design of Instructional Systems* (1989) 18 (2) 119

Scottish Government. (2010) *Building the Curriculum 5*. Scottish Government.