

How does self-assessment impact on pupil learning?

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Group 2C

Rationale

Sound pedagogy is essential in order to build a child's confidence in their successes as sound pedagogy aids a learning environment within which children can confidently engage fully in learning and teaching. Active learning, as defined by Learning and Teaching Scotland (2010), is any teaching strategy that strives to more directly involve students in the learning process. It is built upon two basic beliefs,

“that learning is by nature an active endeavour and that different people learn in different ways” (p17, Meyers & Jones, 1993). As concluded from this reading, when pupils self-assess (analyse and reflect on their own work using particular assessment criteria) as a regular part of classroom activity they:

- Practice and develop their critical thinking skills
- Foster within themselves the ability to self-evaluate and correct.
- Build their own confidence in their abilities.

Assessment in Scottish education can be seen to have had a shift from summative means, using test scores as a means of grouping children, to a more formative based manner. This follows on from the work of Black and William (1998), who proposed re-thinking how we assess young learners to a manner which both supports and reflects the very process of learning. They also attest we can use assessment to influence future learning by informing the next steps of the children's learning journey, which is further reinforced in Building the Curriculum 4. (Building the Curriculum, 2009). One formative method that can be used to inform next steps is self-assessment, which is the focus of the enquiry.

Aim

The aim of this enquiry is to assess the effect of increased self-assessment has on the children's abilities to identify areas for focus in future lessons.

Methodology

This enquiry was conducted in a Primary 3/2 class over a four-week period. A group of six children were identified as a focus group and all six children were from the same Literacy group thus ensuring a consistent level of ability

Children were tasked with writing narrative genre stories for 4 weeks for the enquiry, and were asked to focus on genre features. Given the age of the children, the number of genre features to be self-assessed was whittled down to 4 prior to the enquiry starting, so as not to overwhelm the children. This was decided prior to the enquiry taking place in collaboration with my mentor, the reason being they are still very new to self-assessment, and this is why the focus was narrowed to 4 genre features. The techniques of self-assessment were shared with the class prior to the enquiry, with the rules shared, discussed, modelled and practiced prior to implementation.

Children were provided with an assessment sheet containing the 4 genre features, and asked to, after re-reading their writing, use the AIFL strategy of traffic lighting to self-assess how well they carried out each genre feature within their writing. From observing this technique in the classroom, the children responded by colouring their jotters with a red, amber or green coloured circle against the success criteria of the lesson. Green meant the children achieved the criteria independently, amber meant the children worked towards the criteria but with support. Finally, red meant the children experienced difficulty with the criteria and adult supervision was necessary. They then, upon reflection, provided themselves with one star and one next step, which would be the focus of the next weeks writing. This was then the beginning of the next writing lesson, with the children starting by reviewing their self-evaluated wish for their next piece of writing so it was fresh in their head prior to planning and writing. To be explicitly clear, evidence was gathered in the aforementioned 3 ways relating to 4 genre targets.

Findings

The children took a little while to get used to the new self-assessment procedures. The class had been used to assessing against core targets prior to this enquiry starting. Although the assessment procedures had been discussed and practiced and the genre targets analysed in week 1, the following were examples of feedback provided against the genre targets:-

- I am going to try and improve my writing
- Joining words in the correct order
- Use my full stops in the correct position

This indicated a lack of understanding in what they were assessing against, and, as a result, a lot of further time was spent prior to undertaking the next writing task. Once children were more secure in what they were assessing against, the self-reflection was more evident, and their feedback became more clear and specific over the coming weeks, resulting in steadily improved writing from week 2 onwards. The following were examples of self-feedback provided in week 4 for informing next steps:-

- Put more information into my descriptions
- Bring my story to a conclusion
- Add more details to my main events

- By week 4, the feedback the children were providing for themselves was much closer to the feedback I would provide on their work. Week 1 was essentially a lost week due to the procedures and rules needing recapped, however from week 2 onwards, the improvement in writing and the ability to self-evaluate was evident. After a few weeks of implementing the practitioner enquiry, it became clear that self-assessment has had an impact on pupil learning because the children were able to identify their strengths and areas for improvement in their own writing.

Conclusion

In implementing this approach in my own practice, I noticed a definite increase in engagement with taught writing among the entire class, however this was most noticeable within the focus group of 6. The children enjoyed having a certain level of ownership of their work, and appreciated the opportunity to choose their own next steps, which resulted in improved writing. This was evaluated through discussions with the children, and noticing the quality of self-assessment improving over the 4-week period. Being given a voice appeared to prompt a sense of responsibility in learners for themselves. By the end of the enquiry, learners' feedback was often detailed, insightful and instructive.

However, providing the children with such a platform for self-assessment this early in their learning journey is not without issue. The open approach sometimes meant that the breadth and depth of self-analysis was variable, particularly at the beginning. Learners sometimes gave feedback that was relevant, however it was detached or unrelated to the learning intentions. Therefore, although learners expressed their ideas and opinions freely, some learners received limited assessment of their work in relation to the learning intention of the lesson.

Impact for Future Practice.

As a result of the enquiry I intend to provide children with further platforms within which to self-assess and further enhance their abilities to self-reflect and evaluate on their learners, however I appreciate that these self-assessment techniques and criteria must be explained fully and practiced prior to initial implementation. Allowing learners make key decisions in structural elements of their learning seemed to have a major impact on participation, use of appropriate terminology and learners' abilities to reflect more deeply on their own practice. The development of literacy across learning is highlighted in Curriculum for Excellence as a

responsibility for all practitioners, seeking to promote the development of learners' language skills with emphasis on those skills used by people in everyday life. I intend to experiment further with self-assessment as a means of building language skills across other areas of the curriculum with my class and beyond?

Bibliography

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