

What will happen when I introduce self-assessment checklists to my pupils?

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Rationale

It is essential to have knowledge and understanding of the importance of research and engagement in professional enquiry in order to meet the standards for full registration. Taber suggests that educational research allows us to understand a pupils thinking about particular subjects and their views of classroom learning and general running of the school day (2013). By undertaking our research, our group hoped to meet this criterion whilst simultaneously developing self-assessment skills and creating independence in the pupils in our classes. This was to be achieved through the use of self-assessment checklists. This is because self-assessment creates opportunities for pupils to identify what makes a good piece of work (Boud, 1995) Checklists were chosen as they do not require a large amount of teacher assistance and are easy for pupils to use.

Aims

The aim of this enquiry was to find out what happened when pupils used checklists when completing self-assessment throughout taught writing in a Primary classroom. The self-assessment checklists were to encourage pupils to proof read their work and become more independent throughout the writing process.

Methodology

The enquiry was carried out over a 4 week period with 31 P6 pupils. Although the entire class participated in self-assessment, the research mainly focused on 7 children with a variety of learning needs. Data was collected through a combination of jotter work, observations, exit passes and full class discussions. The pupils were asked to follow their self-assessment checklist throughout the task. The success criteria for the checklist was explained fully at the beginning of the lesson and a class discussion was had to ensure the pupils were aware of what examples of the success criteria looked like. Half way through the lesson the pupils were asked to stop, proof read their work and tick a box next to the success criteria that they had completed so far. At the end of the lesson the pupils would then read their writing piece and tick the box if they had completed the success criteria. If any success criteria was missing, all pupils would be given an opportunity to edit their writing. At the beginning of the next lesson pupils would read over their checklists and were asked to consider how they would improve their learning and meet the success criteria during the lesson. The Assessment is for Learning framework suggests that pupils achieve more when they decide what improvements need to be made in their own learning (Scottish Government, 2005)

Findings

In order to understand the full effect of pupil participation in self-assessment, the pupils were asked their views on self-assessment using checklists before the enquiry began. The majority of the pupils were unsure of what a checklist was and those who were familiar with the concept commented that they often felt confused as to how to use a checklist effectively.

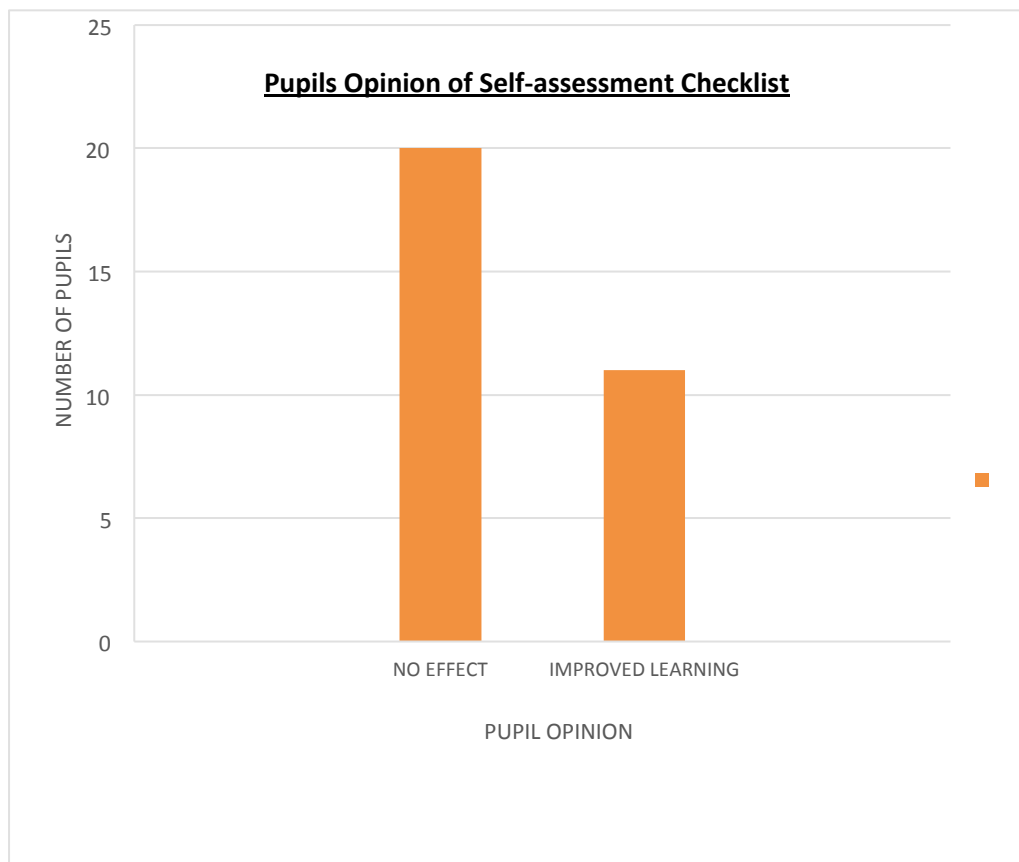
At the start of the enquiry, pupils were unsure of the core and information report targets that the checklist was based on. It was evident that the pupils required more information on the targets and examples of what these targets looked like in their writing in order for this enquiry to have a positive impact on their learning. Once the pupils gained a firm understanding of the targets through discussion and examples in a text, a self-assessment checklist was created which contained the three most accessible genre targets to meet the needs of all of the learners.

A common problem encountered was that the pupils were only focussing on that specific weeks three genre targets which were stated in the self-assessment checklist. This resulted in many pupils ignoring some of the core targets that they are expected to follow throughout every literacy lesson. Although the success criteria of those three targets was being met, the standard of writing was not improving as the pupils were not achieving their core targets. On the second week the teacher explained the core targets in depth and focussed on these in all aspects of literacy. This meant that the pupils became very familiar with the core targets.

It became apparent that the pupils were asking far less questions about the content of the information report and were more focused on the task. The majority of the class were successfully achieving the genre specific targets set out in their checklist and were able to identify what they looked like in their writing.

Carrying out self-assessment at the end of every lesson was not suitable for all of the pupils as many would tick the box even if they had not actually completed that target. This was because they had lost motivation with the task and wished to complete the writing as quickly as possible. However, self-assessment checklists throughout the task were extremely helpful to encourage the pupils to stop, proof read and evaluate their writing before completing the work. This also gave the pupils an opportunity to edit their work before it was complete and ask any questions they had.

The evidence in the pupils written work suggests that all of the pupils in the group made a slight improvement with regards to spelling and punctuation as they were reading their work more thoroughly. As the weeks progressed the pupils who require additional support found the checklists confusing. These pupils did not refer to the checklist throughout the exercise and needed continuous verbal reassurance. Out of the 31 pupils who took part in the survey, 20 thought that the use of self-assessment checklists was helpful. (Figure 1)



(Figure 1: Shows pupils opinion of using checklists when completing self- assessment)

Conclusions

The majority of the pupils enjoyed using the checklists however they felt that they did not improve their ability to include genre specific success criteria. Their ability to proof read and correct spelling and punctuation errors improved due to the mid lesson and end of lesson checklist time and familiarisation of core targets in all aspects of literacy. Therefore, the self-assessment checklist did improve the pupils independence within their learning as they began to independently proof read their work and fix mistakes, However, it did not make a significant difference to their genre writing targets. This was consistent with the findings of the enquiry as although their ability to self-assess using checklists improved, there was no significant improvement in pupil work (verbal or written answers).

Implications for Future Practice

It became clear that checklists should be further differentiated for children with additional support needs. Due to their difficulty reading, the focus group could not easily understand the success criteria the checklist comprised of. However, the pupil's ability to self-assess is improving and the class can independently proof read their work before submitting. I will continue to use checklists for core targets and will encourage the pupils to check their work mid lesson to ensure they are on track. I will also continue to use genre specific checklists for those pupils who are already independent learners as this proved to be beneficial to these learners. I will implement visual checklists with the pupils in the focus group and work closely with this group to ensure they have a clear understanding of how the self-assessment checklist works.

Carrying out this research has raised my awareness of the benefits that self-assessment can have within the classroom and its impact on learners. In order to assess the true impact of self-assessment checklists within writing, the checklists would need to be further differentiated, used over a number of genres and used over a longer period of time to improve understanding.

Bibliography

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