Practitioner Enquiry

What effect does peer-assessment checkpoints have on pupils' learning?

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Rationale

Assessment for Learning is a significant component embedded into teaching and learning. Assessment allows pupils to engage in the learning, encourages pupils to reflect on both the learning intention and the success criteria for the lesson and be effective in their own learning journey as well as that of their peers. It is thought that when pupils are engaged in these processes they develop confidence in identifying and understanding the process of learning and recognising next steps. Building the Curriculum 5 (2010:19) (BtC5) endorses this view stating that for children to become leaders of learning "They should have regular time to talk about their work and to identify and reflect on the evidence of their progress…".

For pupils to be effective in the assessment process they must be supported in developing the skills required. As pupils become more confident in the process they will "take more ownership for managing their own learning." (BtC5) and become reflective and effective contributors of their own and their peer's learning. Peer-assessment enables pupils to support each other.

The findings of Black, P. & Wiliam, D. (2010) support the need for formative assessment and believe some of the most effective techniques developed are self and peer assessment. They consider the idea that this kind of assessment can result in some type of achievement for pupils.

Aims

This practitioner enquiry aimed to:

- investigate the benefits of peer-assessing at checkpoints throughout a lesson
- evaluate the impact of those responses on pupils' learning.

Methodology

The research was carried out over four weeks with a primary five class. The enquiry was conducted during the spelling lessons. The use of checkpoints was discussed with pupils to ensure the process was clearly understood. In addition the checkpoints were modelled for the pupils to further ensure their understanding of what was being asked of them. The pupils worked as a class alongside the teacher to decide what they should be looking for at each checkpoint and came up with a list which they could refer to as they carried out their checkpoints.

Pupils were allocated a partner with whom they worked with for the duration of the enquiry and collection of data. The pupils were paired in their ability groups. The checkpoints were

carried out a minimum of three times each week. The children were encouraged to give both written and verbal feedback. They were asked to give one warm comment which focused on a positive aspect of their partner's work and one cool comment where they identified an area which needed improvement.

The teacher observed the checkpoints and supported the implementation of peer-assessing. The teacher gathered evidence in different forms including; analysing pupils' jotters, observations of the pupil activity, informal discussions with pupils and professional reading.

Findings

Pupils responded well to the checkpoints, most of them really considered the feedback they were giving and delivered it well encouraging their partner with a positive comment and suggesting an area in which they could improve on. In the same way most pupils seemed to take on board the feedback given and considered this when completing the next part of the task.

The analysis of pupils' jotters showed that the standard of written feedback was generally very good and allowed pupils to focus on the learning intention for both themselves and their partner. Over the four weeks this was evident through the jotter analysis where it could be seen feedback had been taken on board and improvements made in the next part of the lesson.

Written comments from the jotters included:

- 'first 5 words spelled correctly'
- 'words matched to the correct sentence'
- 'try to make your writing a bit neater'
- 'you have spelled altogether wrong'

One impact these checkpoints had was that pupils were able to consider the specific learning intentions and the core targets for each lesson.

Through both observations of pupil activity and informal discussions it was highlighted that there were a small numbers of pupils who were finding peer-assessment difficult. They required further support and guidance in what they were looking for and how they could write their feedback when peer-assessing.

These observations and discussions also provided further evidence of the benefits of peer-assessing for these pupils showing that they were finding peer-assessment a useful tool in improving their partners learning, it equally supported children in improving their own work as they were more aware of targets and how to meet the success criteria.

Conclusions

This enquiry has shown that there are many positive benefits to peer-assessing. It has also suggested that the responses, which pupils received from their partners, had a positive impact on learning for most pupils.

Pupils were keen and showed willingness to participate in peer-assessments. Their confidence grew as the weeks went on. Their abilities to provide constructive and insightful feedback increased alongside this confidence. Pupils displayed a sense of responsibility and took their role in assessing seriously.

Implementing this approach in the classroom has had a real impact on highlighting the intended learning. Furthermore the impact it has had on pupil respect, commitment and self-esteem cannot go unnoticed.

However there were a small number of pupils who even with support struggled to give quality feedback. They often gave comments, which were irrelevant and therefore did not help or support the other pupil. In addition it often took these pupils a long time to construct their feedback, which then had an impact on the completion of the intended learning tasks. They did have a bank of comments on the board which they could use however if I did this again I would provided these children with the comments on sticky labels which would hopefully speed up the process.

Overall this enquiry was well received by pupils and had a positive impact on the learning. When asked more than 80% of pupils said they would like to continue using this approach to peer-assessing.

Implications for Future Practice

Carrying out this enquiry has highlighted the importance of peer-assessment and its place in future practice. Although a small group of children required additional support and guidance for most this was an extremely worth-while exercise. Pupils enjoyed being praised by their peers and also took on board suggestions for improvement. As the feedback was instant and pupils were then able to implement improvements straight away resulting in a positive effect on their learning and understanding.

The findings have shown that peer-assessing at checkpoints during a lesson had many benefits and a positive impact on learning for pupils including; improving learning, developing understanding as well as improving many social aspects such as confidence and self-esteem.

As this enquiry was specifically focused on spelling tasks it would be interesting to find out if it would work as well for other areas of literacy and the wider curriculum. I will continue to use these checkpoints through my spelling lessons. I would also like to introduce checkpoints in maths lessons.

Bibliography

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