

A Critical Evaluation on how Assessment for Learning can be Utilised in a Series of Lessons to aid Progression Across Chosen Areas of Learning and Experience

Introduction

The purpose of this writing is to critically evaluate the use of planned assessment for learning and how it aids in pupil progression. This writing will explore the importance of assessment for learning with a group of learners across three different lessons and three areas of learning and experiences (AoLEs). The writing will then engage in a literature review, discussing the general principles of assessment for learning, the key ideas of assessment for learning focusing on the four elements of assessment for learning. As well as exploring the role of assessment for learning in aiding pupil progression, the writer will discuss assessment for learning and its importance for planning for progression for teachers.

According to Cambridge Assessment International Education (2014), assessment for learning is important as it encourages learners to become responsible for their own learning while becoming reflective on their own work which aids their independence. Cambridge Assessment International Education appears to agree with the Welsh Government and new curriculum in Wales. Assessment for learning is highlighted in the seventh pedagogical principle, which the Welsh Government have stated makes good teaching and learning. The Welsh Government (2023) states that engaging with assessment for learning principles is key to good teaching and learning. Wiliam (2011) appears to agree with both the Welsh Government and Cambridge Assessment International Education that assessment for learning is important, he suggests that it is fundamental for both learners and teachers by continuing to state that it could be the only way to ensure that the learning has happened.

Treadaway (2015) believes that it is critical to monitor pupil progression. Treadaway continues to state that every learner will progress at different levels and in different ways and by tracking the progression of each learner it will influence the classroom teaching in an appropriate way to for the teacher to understand what the learner needs to continue developing with their understanding. Upton (2020) seems to agree with Treadaway as he states that continually monitoring pupil progression is the way to ensure that the learners are developing in each AoLE. He continues to state that assessment for learning is a key aspect of pupil progression as it provides a clear picture of where a learner is at and how to move them forward. This is

supported by The Welsh Government (2022) as they state that effective teaching is when the practitioner is monitoring pupil progression using assessment for learning principles, ensuring the learners are understanding and continually moving forward with their learning.

The group of learners who engaged in the lessons were a year 4 class of 30 learners. These learners were between the ages of 8 and 9. These learners were beginning to work toward progression step three, while approximately 10 learners were working within progression step two. The three lessons are focused on the theme of Festivals. The theme 'Festivals' was chosen as a topic by the learners, their parents/guardians and the school community. The three areas of learning and experience (AoLEs) lessons were Languages Literacy and Communication (LLC), Humanities and Science and Technology. Prior to learning about festivals, the learners had no previous knowledge of this topic. The learners researched festivals throughout the term, learning about all aspects of them before the three lessons in discussion were taught. According to The Welsh Government (2023), part of good teaching and learning is when the learning environment supports learners to take responsibility for their learning by being progressively independent with having a choice in their learning. The Welsh Government also state that to support good teaching and learning in line with the new curriculum for Wales, the teacher should engage with parents, guardians and the whole community of the school to be partners in learning.

Literature Review

Assessment for learning is defined by Black and Wiliam (1998) as a necessary element that should be used in a classroom by teachers and learners to ensure high standards of progression. Infact, Black and Wiliam argue that there are no better means for pupil progression. Chappuis and Stiggins (2002) agree with Black and Wiliam as they state that assessment for learning is what creates a successful learning environment that supports the learners to move forward with their learning and progress. Northern Illinois University Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning (2012) report that the purpose of assessment is to use a wide variety of activities to gain an insight into the learner's current level of understanding of what is being taught. They state that there are two types of assessment, one being formative assessment and the other being summative assessment. The university says formative assessment is a continual assessment for everyday use, providing learners with constructive feedback to support progression. Whereas summative assessment is where there are high stakes, like exams and tests, which do not provide feedback during the activity. Spiller (2009),

seems to favor formative assessment, stating that the purpose of formative assessment is to frequently assess learners to support pupil progression, just as Black and Wiliam believe. The University of Greenwich (n.d) appears to have a different view on formative assessment to Spiller and believes that learners may be disengaged with the learning as there are no high stakes which means the learners will not complete the task to the best of their ability. Spiller and The University of Greenwich both seem to have opposing views on summative assessment as well, Spiller states that this form of assessment does not allow the learners to be reflective on their work as it does not provide more opportunities to better it while The University of Greenwich stated that having higher stakes in summative assessment will mean the learners view it with greater importance and therefore engage better.

Black and Wiliam (1998) propose that there are four elements that make up Assessment for Learning, using these will support the practitioner with formative assessment strategies to move the learning forward. Firstly, sharing criteria with learners. Looking at the importance of sharing the success criteria with the learners, NCCA (2015) believe that it is essential for pupil progression as it allows the learner what they are learning, how they will achieve it and even to recognise when they have achieved it. Hattie (2012) stated that by sharing and involving the learners with the success criteria means that the learners know the steps to success and how to reach the end goal, agreeing with the NCCA. Hattie suggests that not doing this would discourage the learners completely, comparing it to a journey, where only the end destination is shared and not the directions to get there, meaningless. Sadler (1998) shares his importance of success criteria, like Hattie, and suggests that not only will it support learners in producing better qualities of work, but it also sets them up for life, creating self-motivating and self-reflective learners to carry these key skills throughout their lives. Sadler and The Welsh Government (2022) appear to agree that creating lifelong learners is important, as highlighted in the four principles by the Welsh Government. The language used by the teacher when sharing the success criteria could create a limitation for this element of Assessment for Learning. According to Willis J, Arnold J and DeLuca C (2023), learners can gather misconceptions before the learning has commenced as they do not understand the written or spoken language used for the success criteria. Although Sadler emphasizes the importance of sharing the success criteria to move the learning forward, he recognizes the same limitation as Willis J, Arnold J and DeLuca C, misinterpretation of the written and spoken language. Orange (2006) appears to agree that this can be a limitation, usually with new teachers.

Secondly, the quality of questioning and/or quality of talk. Rosenshine (1971) discusses the importance of questioning and believes that excellent teachers do this well and it supports the learner's progression. Rosenshine states that to have effective assessment when questioning a teacher can keep asking more questions to check understanding, as well as this, an outstanding teacher can ask check for depth using process questions. Process questions are crucial for progression as it develops a learner's metacognition, which is responsible for providing the learners with an understanding behind their thoughts and the ways they got them (Education Endowment Foundation 2023). This skill seems invaluable, allowing learners to have deep lifelong learning skills, which is exactly what The Welsh Government (2023) want, as previously mentioned. Another benefit of questioning as an assessment tool is that you can change the way you make the learners think, using one word, following Bloom's Taxonomy (Armstrong 2010). Coe et al (2020) all agree with Rosenshine, Armstrong and the Welsh Government as they state that the depth of the questioning is what makes it a great way to assess what the learners understanding is and why. Coe also stated that the quality of the question supports learners to piece together their understanding and elaborate their ideas, and even by asking their own questions, deepening their understanding and promoting their progression. According to the Welsh Assembly Government (2010), a limitation for questioning as an assessment for learning tool is wait time. Rowe (1986) agrees this and says that teachers wait less than one second for a response from the learners before answering, this will not benefit the learners with assessment and progression.

Thirdly, the use and quality of feedback. Kerry (1982) reported that quality of feedback is vital for pupil progression, this being feedback from both the teacher and the learner. He said the use and quality of feedback can encourage engagement and participation from the learners, allowing the teacher to understand where the learner is at and how to move them forward.

Hattie and Clarke (2018) appear to agree with Kerry and believe that quality feedback allows the teacher and learner to know what they need to do next to progress, whether feedback is provided orally or written. They highlight a key factor in feedback that is often overlooked, student feedback. According to Mandouit (2018) there are vast benefits of student to teacher feedback. Overall, teachers' performance will improve. This is as the learners are sharing their own, in-depth understanding of an idea, allowing the teacher to gain an insight into where they are at with the idea and what they need to progress. Another important benefit of this is that it supports the non-participants who may not understand the teacher's question as a learner may paraphrase a question back to the teacher or they may ask a question that fires an

understanding in other learners minds, it may even encourage other learners to participate and feel safe to ask questions to progress their understanding. EL Education (2016) discusses how The Austins butterfly approach shows the importance of student feedback and how it progresses the learner's work, agreeing with Mandouit. The approach suggests that learners understand the feedback better as the language is expressed at the right level. In line with this, McCrudden (2008) suggests that a limitation of feedback is that teachers may not use appropriate language for the feedback and then do not support the learners to understand it or make links to how to progress with said feedback. Kerry suggests a different limitation in feedback, non-participant learners. These learners are not gaining quality feedback from the teacher nor are they providing it to the teacher, in effect the learner is unable to consolidate their understanding of the idea nor is the teacher understanding where they need to go next. This appears to be the reason why Mandouit expresses the value of student to teacher feedback, suggesting that it can lessen or even prevent this limitation.

Finally, peer and self-assessment. This form of assessment can develop a learner into a reflective individual as described by Logan (2009). She continues to state that it encourages deeper thinking by the learner as they must understand the success criteria to provide quality feedback for themselves or their peers. Boud (1995) seems to agree with this and stated that this Assessment for Learning element supports the development of a learner's metacognition, a valuable lifelong skill responsible for deeper thinking and understanding. To be able to self and peer-assess is argued to be a vital lifelong skill by Donaldson (2015) who reported that these learners need to be reflective to master self and peer-assessment, agreeing with Logan on the importance of being reflective. He continues to state that they will take more responsibility for their learning, this being key according to the Welsh Government (2023) who state its importance in the tenth pedagogical principle as key classroom pedagogy. Donaldson also expresses that it shows a learner's ability of deeper thinking as they need a good level of understanding to process and provide feedback. There is a limitation with peer-assessment, suggested by both Northern Illinois University (2012) and Karaca (2009). They argue that the learners are not able to effectively provide quality feedback as they are not expert enough to do so. Logan (2009), from the evidence of her study suggests a limitation in self-assessment is that it takes a very long time to do well. She believes that learners need to be taught this skill early on in their development as it takes a long time to become proficient in so.

Discussion of Lesson Planning Decisions

As previously stated, festivals were the chosen topic by the learners. The school's key pedagogy is to be learner-centered and encourage pupil voice. The focus is to make learning purposeful, linking with real-life context and to encourage curious and creative learners, this makes for core pedagogy (The Welsh Government 2023).

Firstly, lesson one, see appendix one for the lesson plan. A Humanities lesson, where the learners engaged in creating a fact poster on the importance of sustainability in a festival. The purpose of this lesson was to teach the learners the skill, "I can describe and give simple explanations about the impact of human actions on the natural world in the past and present" (The Welsh Government 2020). The lesson's intention was for the learner to develop the skill stated above, as suggested by The Welsh Government to support the learner's progression in understanding how human actions can affect their changing world. The United Nations (2021) are also in agreement with the Welsh Government of the importance in teaching about sustainability through humanities, they state that teaching children in school is the key time to ensure that they become respectful and informed citizens of the world to support the change. During the lesson, the Assessment for Learning focus was on the quality of questions and quality of talk. The questions were planned before the lesson to check their prior knowledge of the discussion area. This allowed the teacher to assess the learners' understanding and how to scaffold the key questions to support the learners to engage in deep thinking. Cambridge Assessment International Education (2023) states that by planning the questions the teacher is ensuring that the topic will be discussed effectively while providing feedback to the teacher about where the learner is at and where to lead next, (see appendix one lesson plan for list of questions). An Assessment for Learning strategy that was used during the quality questioning was wait time. It has been mentioned that teachers wait less than one second for learners to answer questions, therefore it is a key strategy to utilise in to support deeper thinking which leads to progression. Levy (2016) argues that not providing students with appropriate wait time was a mistake he made often as a new teacher. Due to this, the writer, as a student teacher, was cautious of this. He continues to state that using wait time is vital to allow learners to be reflective, an important skill for learners in Wales as stated previously. Another benefit of allowing wait time stated by Takayoshi and Ittersum (2018) is in fact having two wait times, one to ask the question and allow a wait time for a response, the second wait time is where you provide another wait time after the learner answers to encourage an extensive answer by the learner. This means the learner will develop metacognition skills, which is key to informing the teacher where the learner is at and how to get them next, being essential in Assessment for Learning as discussed above. There were limitations to be cautious when planning to use wait

time during the lesson, as stated by Melder (2011). The silence left in the classroom after allowing wait time can be a window for a learner to feel uncomfortable, it could also be an opportunity for disruption meaning the intended purpose of the initial wait time, to encourage the learner to share more of their thinking is lost. When planning for lesson one (see plan one in appendices), the Humanities lesson, it was planned to teach in mixed ability groups. Wilkinson and Penney (2022) suggest that placing learners in groups of mixed ability should be seen as a benefit to all learners. They suggest it greatly impacts those learners of lower-mid ability and aids in pupil progression. This could mean that the higher ability learners are able to support their peers which is what Park and Datnow (2017) agree, they also state that it benefits all learners and state that it provides a sense of responsibility to the learners who are providing support to their peers. Therefore, the planned use of mixed ability groups was to encourage a range of deeper thinking between the learners using quality talk to support each other's ideas.

Secondly, lesson two, see appendix two for the lesson plan. This was for the Languages, Literacy and Communication lesson, where the learners engaged in script writing to prepare and support them to complete an information share video on a festival. The purpose of this lesson was to teach the learners the skill, "I can recognise the appropriate language for different audiences and purposes, varying my expression, vocabulary and tone to engage the audience" (The Welsh Government 2020). Again, the lesson's intention was for the learner to develop the skill above, as suggested by The Welsh Government to support the learner's progression in expressing themselves using language. The National Literacy Trust (n.d) and Catton (2022) also express the importance of teaching language, literacy and communication skills to learners in school. They believe that it vastly develops a learners communication skill and sets them up to be life-long learners, which the Welsh Government (2022) state being key pedagogy. This lesson focused on involving the learners in creating success criteria as the Assessment for Learning strategy. The learners were first provided with a 'what a good one looks like' (WAGGOL) example of a script. Seymour (2019) and Mitchell (2016) both argue the importance of sharing a WAGOLL with the learners and state that it allows them to identify key features of the task and provides them with a clear and relatable view of the highest way to success. WAGOLL's are viewed as an essential assessment for learning strategy but something to be cautious of, suggested by Seymour, is that teachers should not become over-dependent on them, as it is important to have independent individuals. The teacher could then involve the learners in co-constructed success criteria, which would give them an opportunity to check the learner's understanding of the key features of a script after allowing them time to investigate a WAGOLL script. There are benefits of co-constructing the success criteria, Gerzon (2020)

mentions that the learners are more able to reflect on their learning while linking it back to the success criteria as they are now part of the assessment process creating better qualities of work, agreeing with (Sadler 1998). Ritchie and Carpenter (2022) agree on the importance of co-constructing the success criteria as they also believe that better quality of work will be produced, which means that the learners are progressing in that area. They continue to state that the learners may become more accountable with their work as they were the ones to create the steps to achieve it. Allal (2021) believes that teachers should be cautious of the learners writing and use of language abilities, suggesting that learners may not have the skill to complete an acceptable success criteria. When planning for lesson two (see plan two in appendices), the Languages, Literacy and Communication lesson, it was planned to teach in ability groups. This was planned to attempt to create a comfortable learning environment for the learners (Gripton 2020). She continues to state that learners may feel more included in the lesson, which The Thomas B Fordham Institute (2021) suggests may aid in pupil progression.

Thirdly, lesson three, see appendix three for lesson plan. During this lesson, the learners used the “Capcut: app on an iPad to gain knowledge on how to use the software and to teach the learners the skill, “I can identify and consider factors when developing design proposals” (The Welsh Government 2020). The lesson's intention was for the learner to develop the skill above, as suggested by The Welsh Government to support the learner's progression in thinking and designing creative ideas to fit in with today's day in age. To support the learners in progressing with this skill, the teacher used a mini plenary Assessment for Learning strategy. Mini plenaries are frequently used by teachers to address misconceptions or to check learners are all on the same page, according to Estyn 2022. Therefore, this was important during the lesson as most of the learners had never used the ‘Capcut’ app. The Welsh Government (2013) agree with Estyn, they both state that it is an effective way for the learners to reflect on their learning thus far, address any issues and how to continue to progress through the lesson. The teacher used learners who had experience on the app and labelled them as the ‘experts’, these learners supported their peers throughout the lesson by guiding them through each mini plenary. Joyce-Gibbons (2017) completed a study reporting that teachers complete mini plenaries to get the learners all back on track, which was the aim of the lesson, to get all the learners to progress through each success criteria together addressing misconceptions as a whole-class to ensure proficient use of the app. Didau (2016) argues that caution needs to be taken when using mini plenary's, not to waste time. He suggests they take time away from teaching the lesson's valuable content which he believes disrupts progression. When planning lesson three (see plan three in appendices), Science and Technology, it was planned for a whole class session. The

University of Maryland (n.d) suggests that whole class teaching allows learners to support and develop off one another. This was key in this lesson, especially in the use of the class 'experts' who volunteered to lead by example for the other learners.

Conclusion

To conclude, it is evident that Assessment for Learning should be crucial pedagogy within the classroom as it aids progression. There are many benefits to the assessment strategies and some suggested limitations that practitioners should be cautious of. It has shown that no matter what the Area of Experience and Learning is, there are many ways to implement effective Assessment for Learning in the classroom. There is a clear drive for Assessment in Learning in Wales as looking back at what The Welsh Government (2023) states is that it is key to good teaching and learning, that it is key pedagogy. We must remember that Assessment for Learning is not only important for the learners and aiding pupil progression, but it is also important for the teacher as Wiliam (2011) argues it is the only way a teacher will know where the learners need to go next, suggesting that this is the only way teachers will know what to teach. Another important note is that it seems all four elements of Assessment for Learning seem to complement one another, meaning that using these elements of Assessment for Learning when teaching could all work in aiding pupil progression. Looking at what Hattie (2012) said about the learners need to know the end goal and how to get there means they need to understand how to get there, possibly by the quality of questioning and the quality of talk, as Rosenshine (1971) suggests being the way to get learners to understand. Again, Logan (2009) states that to peer and self-assess well the learners must understand the success criteria to be able to ensure they achieved the end goal, suggesting that they would only be successful at peer and self-assessment if they had the success criteria shared with them. Finally, the quality of feedback. As Kerry (1982) and Mandouit (2018) both state, quality of feedback is best when deep understanding has been established between the learner and teacher, orally or written, which could suggest that there was a quality of talk going on between them to establish effective feedback.

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Appendices