

What is the perception of self-assessment as an AFL strategy from the perspective of staff and pupils?

Introduction

The purpose of this assignment is to research and discuss the perception of self-assessment as an AFL strategy from both the staff's and pupils' perspectives. Assessment for learning (AFL) *"is an approach to teaching and learning designed to improve students' performance and create effective feedback."* (Saxton, 2021). While the assignment will be focused primarily on self-assessment as an AFL strategy it is important to understand what is meant by AFL as an over-arching theme. There are four elements of assessment for learning, they are as follows; *"Questioning, Feedback, Peer and self-assessment, The formative use of summative assessment"* (Flórez and Sammons, 2013, p. 7). The reason that self-assessment was selected as the primary focus of this assignment is that the primary researcher was of the opinion that there would be a larger amount of discussion to be had with pupils and staff about self-assessment compared to the other three elements of assessment for learning. The method being used to conduct the research is the 'Mosaic approach'. *"The Mosaic approach was developed during a research study to include the 'voice of the child'"* (Clark, 2011, p.1). The purpose for the selection of the 'Mosaic approach' is to get an accurate representation of the pupils' opinions where other research methods may be less representative of the child's opinions. The research included in this assignment was undertaken on 02/05/2023 in Ysgol [REDACTED]. Ysgol [REDACTED] is a through school located in Port Talbot, Neath-Port Talbot. The research will be conducted on the Year 4 class containing pupils aged eight to nine in addition to the Key Stage 2 (years 3-6) teachers. The class whom the research is being conducted on contains thirty-three pupils, of which ten will be selected to undertake the interviews. The questionnaire will be sent via email to the four teachers of Key Stage 2. Interviews and questionnaires were decided upon as the research tools for the assignment due to the fact that they will provide a variety of both qualitative and quantitative data to give the best possible understanding of both the pupils' and teachers' opinions on the use of self-assessment.

Literature Review

Assessment for learning is a vital part of modern learning. The purpose of assessment for learning is to *"support individual learners on an ongoing, day-to-day basis; identify, capture and reflect on individual learner progress over time; understand group progress in order to reflect on practice"* (hwb.gov.wales, 2022). This suggests that assessment for learning is not

a short-term process but rather that it takes time for teachers to accurately assess pupils rather than giving them a simple score based on standardised tests. Assessment for learning was first introduced in Wales in 2008 but has only existed in its current form, using the four main areas of assessment for learning, since 2022 (Arfon, 2022). As previously stated, the new assessment for learning guidance in Wales focuses on four main areas. The areas are “*Questioning, Feedback, Peer and self-assessment, The formative use of summative assessment*” (Flórez and Sammons, 2013, p. 7). The use of questioning as an assessment for learning strategy “*is not merely a pedagogical tool to elicit evidence of students’ understanding but also a means to improve their understanding.*” (Sardareh et al., 2014, p. 161-174). This extract shows the importance of questioning in the classroom as it not only assesses what the pupils remember but can also be used to dig deeper in order for the teacher to truly understand the pupils’ understanding of what has been taught and learned. The second of the four areas is feedback. “*The dialogic nature of feedback enables teachers and students to revisit and rethink their own teaching and learning (Dann, 2015).*” (Zhang and Zheng, 2018, p. 1-2). This quote shows the importance of feedback in allowing both teachers and pupils to use their voices in the classroom setting resulting in both parties being able to improve upon any concerns the other has while continuing to do what they have done well. The third area of AFL is peer and self-assessment. Peer-assessment is “*a method of assessing children’s work where students look at a partner’s work and assess it.*” (Twinkl.co.uk, 2023) and self-assessment “*provides students with an opportunity to self-evaluate, or make judgments about their learning process and products of learning, based on criteria that they have agreed on with their instructor.*” (www.queensu.ca, n.d.). While peer and self-assessment are in the point of the four areas, there are distinct differences between the two as shown in the points made by Twinkl.co.uk (2023) and www.queensu.ca (n.d.). The fourth and final area of assessment for learning is the formative use of summative assessment. Cambridge-community.org.uk (n.d.) suggests that summative assessment is important as it attempts to “*measure student attainment at the end of a period of learning.*” but in a formative sense by using methods such as questioning and feedback to do so. As the sources used show the four areas of assessment for learning show a fair amount of crossover suggesting that using them to supplement one another may be the most effective way to assess the learning of pupils. The chosen element of assessment for learning being discussed in this assignment is self-assessment. The purpose of peer and self-assessment being split for the assignment is that, despite being in the same of the four areas of assessment for learning, peer and self-assessment differ too much to conduct research on both in just one day. Self-assessment is “*crucial for developing self-regulated and lifelong learning*” (Yan and Carless, 2021, p. 1), this statement displays the importance of self-assessment as an assessment for learning strategy, it is for this reason that self-assessment

was chosen as the main focus for the assignment. The use of self-assessment is extremely valuable because *“the real power of self-assessment lies not in teacher marking completed pieces of work, then moving onto the next learning objective, but by “integrating the practice into the continual process of working on a task.”* (Pollard, 2014, p367)” (Understanding the Contemporary Issues in Learning & Teaching, 2014). Self-assessment can, however, not be utilised all of the time. Sources such as Yan and Carless (2021) believe that self-assessment is best when used alongside feedback in order to ensure that the pupils are not only looking at their own work and writing a ‘tick’ or a ‘cross’ next to answers but also that they are getting useful and appropriate feedback from their teachers so that they properly understand what they have learned and what they have achieved.

Methodology

The research method being used in this assignment is the ‘Mosaic approach’, *“The Mosaic approach is a multi-method approach in which children's own photographs, tours and maps can be joined to talking and observing to gain deeper understanding of children's perspectives”* (Clark and Moss, 2001). The fact that the ‘Mosaic approach’ is a “multi-method approach” means that, in order to use it successfully, there must be more than one research tool used to conduct the research. The research tools that will be used are interviews and questionnaires. The purpose for choosing interviews and questionnaires is to ensure that there is good quality data in both qualitative and quantitative forms. This notion is supported by Alex Osbaldeston (2021) when they said *“Bringing qualitative and quantitative ... research together through one, unified online platform enables you to gain a holistic picture”*. Through reading literature for this assignment, it has been found that the only real negatives to using both qualitative and quantitative together while conducting research are limitations within the researcher’s skillset, namely if they are more comfortable with one style of data than the other. This is supported by Sami Almaki (2016, p. 291) when it was stated that researchers must be *“able to cope with the demands of utilising a mixed methods approach (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011)”*. As a result of this being the only pertinent point against using both qualitative and quantitative data simultaneously, the decision to use both forms of data is believed to be the correct one. The process of collecting data in Ysgol [REDACTED] will be undertaken over the course of one school day on 02/05/2023. Before undertaking any research, the headteacher of Ysgol [REDACTED] will be presented with a consent (see appendix 4) form allowing for the research to take place once signed. In addition to the consent form all pupils will be asked for verbal assent before and throughout the interview process. The interview section of the research will be conducted on a one-to-one basis and the group of pupils being interviewed will be selected at random. The random pupils will be

selected from a larger group of volunteers and will be assured that participation is completely voluntary in addition to being reassured throughout the process that they have the option to stop whenever they want and also that they can refuse to answer any questions that they do not want to or that they feel uncomfortable with. Despite the fact that the subjects will be given these reassurances, there are no questions in the interviews that are deemed to be uncomfortable or inappropriate. The questionnaires will be distributed to Key Stage 2 teachers by email and the results will be made into graphs to display the data. The members of staff will be given the same reassurances as the pupils meaning that the questionnaires will be completely voluntary and the teachers will be able to skip any questions that they feel are inappropriate or that make them uncomfortable. Once again, there are no questions that are deemed inappropriate or uncomfortable within the questionnaire. The identities of all parties taking part in the research will be completely anonymous with any and all names of pupils, teachers and schools being redacted from any and all evidence submitted to the university. All of the research undertaken will strictly adhere to BERA (2018) guidance and will be completed in a completely ethical and professional manner. There are some potential limitations to the research however, the first is that there may not be enough pupils who are willing to participate in the interview process, though this is improbable it is still a possibility as is the possibility that the teachers do not complete the questionnaire. Another limitation to the research, and most likely the largest, is the timeframe available to complete the research. It would be significantly less difficult to complete the research and to collect a larger sample of data with more than one six-hour school day. Despite giving a vague idea of the answer to the research question, it would prove much more useful to have a much larger sample taken from pupils of various ages from various different schools to ensure a more diverse and, therefore, more informative source of data.

Results and Discussion

The first point that it is necessary for discussion is the fact that none of the teachers completed the questionnaire and therefore the data collected is incomplete. While the fact that the teachers failed to respond to the questionnaire means that the approach being used has changed somewhat, it will still be possible to understand the perceptions of self-assessment from the perspective of the pupils. The data collected from the sample of pupils in the interview process is, for the most part, detailed, useful information. The interview was comprised of six questions they were as follows:

1. Do you ever use self-assessment in class?
2. What methods do you use?
3. How often do you do it?

4. What lessons do you do it in most?
5. Do you prefer self-assessment or when the teacher marks your work?
6. Why?

Of the ten pupils involved in the interviews, 80% answered “yes” to question one, with the other 20% answering “sometimes”. The fact that every pupil answered that self-assessment is in fact used in their lessons shows that the school is following their ‘Ysgol [REDACTED] Primary Phase AFL Continuum’ (see appendix 2). The data collected for question 2 shows much more variety in the answers with one pupil answering “we use traffic lights, success criteria and t-mail.” and another simply answering “success criteria”. All of the pupils interviewed gave a crossover of the same self-assessment techniques. Due to all of the pupils displaying some understanding of different self-assessment techniques being used and the fact that all of the pupils interviewed are in the same class the conclusion can be drawn that not all of the pupils have a proper understanding of what constitutes a self-assessment technique. The answers to question 3 showed the largest variety of answers with answers ranging from “basically every lesson” to “once every five months” with all of the other answers falling somewhere in the gulf in-between. The fact that there is such a large variance in the answers to the third question could be due to a number of factors. One such factor is that, oftentimes pupils may not realise that they are even performing self-assessment as it is often integrated into the lesson itself. A way of avoiding the large variance is that the interviewer could have posed the question as multiple-choices rather than allowing for an open answer. With regards to the fourth question every pupil said that they use self-assessment in literacy with one pupil saying they use it in every lesson every day. It is worth noting that the class uses a “challenge planner” (see appendix 3) to assess their progress in their schoolwork outside of literacy and numeracy with every pupil colouring in an envelope either red, orange or green to self-assess their work using a traffic light system. Once again, the use of a system such as the “challenge planner” may simply be overlooked as a self-assessment strategy by the pupils as it is done so regularly. The fifth and sixth questions work together with question six generating a particularly large amount of discussion from the pupils. The pupil responses were varied with 60% of the pupils saying they preferred self-assessment to other assessment for learning strategies while 30% stated they prefer other methods including two pupils who said they particularly enjoy ‘marking their friend’s work’. The remaining 10% of the pupils said that they like a balance between self-assessment and other methods. In response to question six the pupils were asked for their opinion on why they had made their choice. Most of the pupils who said they prefer other methods said that their reasons for making their choice is that they already know what they think of their work and that they appreciate an alternate opinion whether that of their

teachers or of their peers. One of the pupils interviewed stated that they prefer the teacher marking their work so that they get to have more free time rather than spending it assessing their own work. The pupils who stated that they preferred self-assessment all said that they like to see how they have done before showing a peer or a member of staff. The opinion held by these pupils clearly displays the opinion that the pupils believe that self-assessment is best used and most effective, at least in the pupils' opinions, when used in conjunction with other assessment for learning strategies such as feedback or peer-assessment.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be observed that the opinions of self-assessment from the perspective of the pupils are fairly mixed, and while self-assessment is a useful strategy for assessment for learning, both the texts discussed in the literature review and the pupils in the interview process agree with the notion that self-assessment is most successful when used alongside other assessment for learning strategies such as feedback and peer-assessment. It also seems as though it would prove useful to give pupils a better understanding of what self-assessment actually means because of the discrepancy in answers when asked how often they use self-assessment. Despite the fact that the initial research proposal was based around the use of the 'Mosaic approach', the failure to complete the questionnaire by the teachers left the research to be of a singular approach rather than multi-layered. The research, however still provided a reasonable amount of data to be discussed. It did, however, prove to be a hurdle that could be avoided in future research tasks, either by providing only pupils with both research methods or by giving the members of staff involved prior notice to the distribution of the questionnaires. When conducting future research, it would be extremely beneficial to be allowed more time to conduct the research and on a larger group of subjects in order to achieve the greatest level of accuracy in data collection. During the research process, from lectures to writing the assignment, the opportunity for the improvement of research skills and the understanding of assessment for learning as a whole was presented and utilised successfully in the pursuit of becoming a better educator and bettering the standard of education for all pupils.

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