

Design and conduct a small-scale research study, and critically evaluate the impact of chosen research tools and data findings on the learner and on your professional practise.

Do staff and students find self/peer assessment effective as a form of AFL?

Assessment for learning is at the forefront of many practitioners' minds when designing classroom-based tasks, throughout this assignment assessment for learning (AFL) strategies will be discussed and reflected upon, namely, self and peer assessment. The research question 'do staff and students find self/peer assessment effective as a form of AFL?' aims to find out the opinions of both staff and students in regards to this specific strand of assessment for learning. The underlying objective of this research is to improve professional practise going forward through the identification of strengths and weaknesses of the methods associated with self and peer assessment.

Assessment for learning is defined by Dylan Wiliam as being formative strategies used by teachers to inform classroom practise, feedback, and self-regulated learning (Wiliam, 2011). Continuing from this, self-assessment is defined as being a judgement one makes of their own performance or abilities (Cambridge dictionary , n.d.). This is an agreed definition by many including the Berkeley Well -being institute who include the use of standards in their definition. Meaning self-assessment is the evaluation of skills marked against a personalised set of standards in order to measure progress. (Saulsbery, n.d.). The definition for peer assessment is the opportunity for pupils to evaluate and critique the work of their peers, providing feedback for improvement. It is believed that the skills derived from peer assessment techniques enables students to take responsibility for their work and take on board as well as give out constructive criticism. (Cornell University , n.d.).

Assessment for learning is a core part of the curriculum for Wales, following the recent curriculum reforms the Welsh government aims to make assessment an intrinsic part of the curriculum. There is an emphasised importance on informing learners on how what they learn today will benefit them in the future. The intention behind this change is to create a shared understanding of progression, staff and students will both know their next steps for progression through the newly designed continuum styles curriculum. (HWB, 2022).

Prior to carrying out this research, I believe that staff and students would have a positive reaction to self and peer assessment however I think that they would both agree that a different form of AFL would be more effective within their classroom, therefore my hypothesis is that staff and students do find peer/self-assessment effective as a form of AFL however it is not the most effective method. In order to answer the research question and evaluate whether or not the hypothesis is correct, research will be undertaken using the mosaic approach and interview with pupils in combination with a questionnaire distributed to staff in order to collect primary data.

Assessment for learning refers to an activity within an education setting that generates feedback for the purpose of furthering pupil development. (NFER, n.d.) There are two types of classroom assessment, summative and formative, the first being assessment of learning. This is based on the knowledge pupils have retained and how they relay this knowledge at certain points during the academic year, for example end of year tests. The latter method of assessment is more in line with assessment for learning which acts as a guide to the learning process. (NHS, 2021). There are four types of assessment for learning, they are highlighted as quality of feedback, quality of questioning, sharing success criteria and self and peer assessment. (Halley Primary School, 2016)

Assessment for learning is a prominent area within the education sector, which undergoes continuous research to improve the quality of learning for pupils, following research published by Dylan Wiliam and Paul Black it is suggested that assessment for learning has a positive impact on the quality of learning within the classroom, however there is significant room for improvement. There should be a focus on creating a learning environment that fosters progression through dialogue between staff and students. (Black, et al., 2004). Assessment for learning is built upon multiple principles with the core being determining the next steps in a Childs progression, some of which include encouraging a commitment to learning goals and recognising AFL as a centralised part of the classroom. These principles are derived from key research carried out by Black and Wiliam, published in 'Inside the Black Box' and presented in leaflet form with the purpose of safeguarding the right to good quality assessment for learning. (Assessment Reform Group, 2002). Similarly to this, there is a shared belief among academics that assessment for learning (AFL) should be integrated into the classroom, becoming a natural part of the feedback process. Whereby clear progression steps are identified and communicated between the teacher and the

learner. There should be an understanding of where the learner is currently within their academic journey, where they need to go next and what they need to do to get there, there are a variety of techniques employed by teachers to gather information in regard to a student's progression, including sharing success criteria, questioning, and providing feedback. (Cambridge assessment International Education , 2019). Assessment for learning is an area of education that is undergoing continuous development, the link between lesson planning and learning should be clearly emphasised in order for individuals to understand what they need to do in order to achieve the personalised targets set for their progression. (Jones, 2005). According to the Great Teacher Toolkit, creating a continuous loop of feedback leads to a self-improving system whereby pupils understand why they are doing what they are doing. The feedback system is designed to be supportive and encouraging to further pupil progression and raise engagement. (Toolkit, 2020)

There are both positive and negative arguments that can be made for the current methods of assessment for learning, as research is continuously being carried out in order to develop the quality of teaching being delivered to pupils across Great Britain. Some of the benefits of AFL include pushing the focus on to the aims of the learning, which allows pupils to have a clearer understanding of what they need to do in order to succeed. In addition to this, providing feedback in real time allows for alterations to be made to the lessons as they are happening which in turn limits confusion and targets areas of weakness in both teaching style and learning knowledge. (Cambridge assessment International education , 2019). In support of this, John Hattie's research found that providing feedback positively impacts pupil learning and this method of assessment was ranked at ten out of one hundred and fifty by Hattie (Hattie, 2012).

One of the drawbacks associated with assessment for learning is the confusion between whether a task is summative or formative in its method of assessment. Many can serve both purposes whereas AFL favours a formative approach, looking at where to go next as opposed to a summative approach of what has been achieved up to this point. (Wiliam, 2018). As well as this, the purpose of assessment may sometimes become blurred, the purpose is not to evaluate the teacher but the reaction of the pupils to the material. (Jones, 2005)

Assessment for learning is at the heart of many classrooms in Great Britain, with staff believing that it is important for pupils to regularly reflect on the work they are doing,

setting themselves targets and focusing on identifying targets for progression. There is also a focus on constructive criticism from both the pupil and peers based on an outlined list of criteria. Practitioners view self and peer assessment multi purposeful, not only are students able reflect on their own progression but they are also taught key what is expected of them to attain certain levels. (Teachers TV/UK Department of Education , 2010). Researchers believe self and peer assessment allows students to take greater ownership over their learning however children do not possess these skills, they need to be taught, this is where the role of the class teacher is detrimental in equipping the students with these skills. (Hall & Burke, 2004). Researchers support the theory that self and peer assessment must be based on a sound knowledge of the process, Wylie and Lyon described self-assessment as being a three-step process, the first of which being monitor, here students track where they are in relation to a set of criteria, this is followed by an evaluation and the setting of targets. (Wylie & Lyon, 2020). Researchers including Berger concluded that for peer assessment to be effective it must be kind, specific and helpful. This feedback should be monitored by the class teacher in order to maintain a level of correctness, this enables the feedback to be useful to pupils and creates a model of a good feedback loop. This gives pupils skills that they can carry forward through their education. (ESTYN, 2022).

My data collection will take place in a school I have carried out a placement with and will be referred to as Trinity Primary school for the purpose of anonymity. I carried out an interview with 15 year six pupils in focus groups of five participants followed by a questionnaire for teaching staff in key stage two. The data collection will take place over the course of one day.

Having engaged with literature prior to designing the research question, it is important to curate a study that will encompass each element of assessment for learning in the research design. Therefore, my research will be conducted using the mosaic approach which is a research method created by Clark and Moss. Dr Nicole Brown likens the mosaic approach to tiles, each individual tile when put together allows the researcher to see the whole picture. This is a unique but resourceful research method especially when working with children as it allows the researcher to gather plentiful data from participants, namely children who may not respond to typical data collection methods. (Brown, 2015). As the research design requires the participation of primary school aged children in order to answer the research question the mosaic approach was deemed the correct choice in terms

of research design, the focus on the views of the children and the reinforcement that there are no wrong answers allows the children to speak freely and have their views pieced together to complete the mosaic. (Clark, 2011).

Within the mosaic approach, the research tools that I have chosen to use are a questionnaire which was distributed electronically and an interview which would take place in person. By using these research tools, there will be a variety of quantitative and qualitative data to summarise. The benefits of using a combination of research tools that will provide both quantitative and qualitative results include the data being rich and complex, exploring the topic in depth and it considers the attitudes and beliefs of the participants. This is a result of the qualitative methods including open-ended questionnaire questions and the interview portion of the data collection, whereas the quantitative methods including closed questionnaire questions produce data that is impersonal but factual and generally broad in terms of its specificity. (nfer, 2013).

There are both strengths and limitations associated with distributing a questionnaire, some of the limitations include the complex nature of choosing suitable questions which will enrich the study, as well as this, considerations must be made prior to beginning the data collection in regard to how the data will be analysed. (Bell, 2010) Therefore, the data collected will be presented in graphs to be analysed. On the other hand, digitally distributed questionnaires have a higher response rate than their physical counterparts, they also provide instant feedback and can be tailored to the sample group. (Gelder, et al., 2010) Furthermore, the questionnaires may be incomplete, or completed by people outside of the sample group as there is no way to guarantee the trustworthiness of the participants. Although, they are a low-cost data collection option that can be easily distributed. (Welsh Government , 2015).

The next data collection method used was an interview, according to the Welsh Government, the strengths of this method are as follows: they are highly flexible and can be easily adapted to follow the flow of the conversation as well as the ability for interviewees to express when they do not wish to answer or do not understand the question that are being asked. These factors result in in depth feedback. (Government, 2015). In addition to this, interviews carried out with a focus group are considered a more cost-effective option to single person interviews, as well as this, participants converse with one another producing more detailed responses. (George, 2012). Some of the limitations associated with

this method are the participants feeling pressured to respond in a certain way to appease the interviewer and some groups may be reluctant to participate. (Government, Welsh, 2015).

When carrying out research it is important to consider the ethical implications that it may have, especially when working with children. Therefore, it is important to take into account the following aspects, confidentiality, anonymity, the right to withdraw and consent. Firstly, I gained consent from the participants who took part in the data collection portion of by distributing a consent form, according to the BERA guidelines, for participants engaging with a research project they should provide voluntary informed consent. The British Educational Research Association (BERA) emphasises the importance of informed consent, the participant must have an understanding of the process in which they are involved, this includes what they will be doing, why they will be doing it, where the research will be published. It is also outlined that it is the responsibility of the researcher to gain this consent. (Ramrathan, et al., 2017). For this reason, I chose to distribute consent forms to the headteacher of Trinity Primary school a week prior to my arrival, the consent form also included a detailed synopsis of the data collection including details about where the information would be used. According to researchers' ethics are a detrimental aspect of research design, concerns arise due to the nature of research and the methods of data collection applied. (Cohen, et al., 2007).

BERA also outlines the importance of informing participants of their right to withdraw, it should be made clear that withdrawal can take place at any point during the process without needing to provide a reason. In addition to this, participants should be reminded of this as part of on-going consent. (BERA, 2018). I chose to gain on going consent by asking the participants regularly throughout the interviews whether or not they wished to continue as well as informing them that they did not have to participate and could change their mind at any point without facing any consequences.

As my research involves the participation of children under the age of eighteen assent must be attained, this is consent granted on behalf of the child from a guardian. (NSPCC, 2020), as well as this, the children will be asked throughout the interview whether or not they wish to continue. In addition to this BERA outlines the importance of keeping participants anonymous, this means not including any details that could be used to identify the participants (BERA, 2018). In order to keep participants anonymous, the questionnaire

will be distributed via google forms where no personal information is taken, and the results are submitted namelessly. As well as this, the name of the school will not be recorded, neither will the names of the pupils. For the purpose of discussing the data the school will be referred to as Trinity Primary School and the pupils will be referred to as Pupil A,B,C etc.

Following the data collection, the responses collected during the interview were digitised in the form of a transcript, this will be referred to as appendix one. Appendix one shows that of the fifteen children interviewed, all of them responded yes when asked if they have the opportunity to mark their own work as well as this one hundred percent of participants said yes when asked if they had the opportunity to mark the work of their peers. This result supports the views of teachers who when asked if they use self-assessment and peer assessment in the classroom, responded yes. As shown in appendix 2 one hundred percent of teachers who responded to the questionnaire said they used peer and self-assessment, this is in line with the guidance for assessment published by the Welsh Government's curriculum for Wales. As previously mentioned, assessment for learning should be at the forefront of a practitioner's mind when implementing their curriculum. (Welsh Government, 2022). In addition to this, when asked how they mark their work, pupils responded with a variety of answers some of which included using ticks and crosses however the general consensus across the three focus groups was by giving a small constructive comment, this is supported by the Great Teaching Toolkit. This emphasises the need for a continuous feedback loop whereby pupils receive constructive criticism to give them an understanding of what the next steps are in their academic journey. (Great teaching toolkit, 2020). Appendix 3 shows that self/peer assessment is not the most popular assessment for learning method used by the teachers in the sample group, appendix 4 shows that teachers at Trinity primary feel the drawbacks of this method include students showing discomfort when admitting they got things wrong, and some may lack understanding of the task. These drawbacks are similar to those discussed by the centre of enhancement for teaching and learning within the university of Hong Kong, they included students being unfamiliar with the assessment criteria and how they are expected to assess themselves and one another. (Chan, 2010). On the other hand, the teachers also found the benefits associated with self/peer assessments to be providing students with an opportunity to understand where they made mistakes within a task and gain independence through marking their own work and that of their peers. (Appendix 5) however, in contrast with this,

the pupils when interviewed expressed that they did not enjoy self/peer marking as they were unsure of what they should be looking out for and how to give constructive feedback, this links back to the aforementioned drawbacks described by Chan. Continuing on from this, fifty percent of teachers who responded to the questionnaire preferred to use peer assessment in their classroom where as the other fifty percent preferred self-assessment when asked to pick between the two, as seen in appendix 6 and is supported by NFER who provide details in support of both methods including how some children may find it more beneficial to comment on another students work than their own and vice versa. (NFER, n.d.).

Additionally, appendix 7 shows that all teachers that took part in the questionnaire ranked self/peer assessment as being 3 out of 5 when asked how beneficial this method of assessment for learning is. This rating matches the data that has been collected through the questionnaire as teachers were able to identify strengths in relation to the approach, but they also preferred to use other methods of AFL within their classrooms. Perhaps this factor could be linked with the pupil's response (see appendix 1) to whether they would prefer to mark their own work or have their work marked by a teacher. All of the pupils chose to have their work marked by a teacher and when prompted to give an explanation shared feelings such as teacher marking provides clear feedback, they know what they need to do to improve, there is no confusion and little chance that it could have been marked wrong. Therefore, the data has led to the conclusion that staff and students do find self/peer assessment effective as a form of assessment for learning, this is reinforced by appendix 8 which demonstrates that all teachers from the sample group find any information they gather from self/peer assessment useful in aiding pupil progression. This ties in with the Governments curriculum for Wales' focus on formative assessment being a focus within the classroom. (HWP, 2022). The data is also supported by the literature which is sampled in the literature review, as the drawbacks and strengths are reflected in the minds of the pupils and the teachers which adds validity to the data collected.

One drawback of this method was that only half of the sample group filled out the questionnaire, therefore the data is limited and is more difficult to extrapolate (Faber & Fonseca , 2014). Therefore, if I was to carry out a similar research project in the future, I would use a larger sample group to gather as many responses as possible as well as distributing the survey earlier. Another challenge I faced when carrying out the interviews

was that the children were giving very short, one-word answers, so to mitigate this I encouraged them to talk amongst themselves in their focus groups to share ideas and try to give answers in sentences. This decision was based on research carried out by Liebovich (Liebovich, 2000) whereby the researcher carries out an interview with children who are providing limited answers and therefore her methods required adaptation moving from individual interviews to paired.

In summary, the literature surrounding self and peer assessment as a form of AFL outlines the strengths of the method and the areas in which improvements can be made, supports the data collected during this research project. The general consensus is that whilst self and peer assessment is a valuable tool in the classroom, students require the necessary skills in order to complete the task with meaningful effect. From the data it can be interpreted that the students at trinity Primary lacked confidence in carrying out self and peer assessment related tasks which limited the scope of the feedback they could provide. This in turn would have a detrimental effect on the feedback loop within the classroom, as the pupils are required to have an understanding of both the method of assessment and the intention in order to succeed. (Welsh Assembly Government, 2010).

My findings also concluded that teachers at Trinity primary favoured a blend of the other three methods of assessment for learning which lined up with the data collected from the students who expressed that self/peer marking was a rare occurrence within their classes. This increases the validity of my results as there were no discrepancies between the information provided by the staff and the students.

In conclusion the answer to the research question is yes staff and students do find self and peer assessment to be a beneficial method of assessment for learning however upon deeper reflection it is not the favoured method of formative assessment within the classroom. This proved the hypothesis to be correct and therefore my recommendations would be based on the government's guidance for assessment which like previously mentioned focuses the importance on informing the students of each step of the process to build their confidence in their ability. In terms of my professional progress I will use these findings to inform my approach to self/peer assessment ensuring my students are fully informed and confident in their knowledge.

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