



# **WHAT ARE STAFF AND PUPILS EXPERIENCES OF USING SUCCESS CRITERIA?**

Jess Gethin (2104002)



# **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 practice.**

## **Introduction.**

The purpose of this study is to investigate learners and staff experiences of assessment for learning (AFL) strategies. Black & William (1998) defined formative assessment which is synonymous with AFL as; the activities carried out by a teacher and their class to gain information which underpins feedback, reforming teaching and learning to suit the differentiated needs of learners. Similarly, the curriculum for Wales 2022 has been reformed to 'ensure that supporting learners to make progress is at the heart of assessment' (Welsh Government 2022).

The aim of this study is to gauge to what extent a specific AFL strategy is constructive in teaching and learning. The research question for this study was 'What are staff and pupils' experiences of using success criteria?'. The hypothesis that inspired this research question was the idea of whether success criteria gave pupils the necessary steps to succeed in their work or whether success criteria was being viewed as a tick box-compulsory activity. This hypothesis was based upon prior teaching experiences where both scenarios appeared accurate.

To approach the research question ethically, a mosaic approach to data collection was selected. According to Clark (2001), the mosaic approach describes a framework for research in which the child's voice is included in data collection. Recognising every child's right to freedom of expression (UNICEF, 2017) it was decided that the research day would consist of staff questionnaires (see appendix 3) but also pupil interviews (see appendix 5) to give learners the opportunity to voice their opinions on strategies they use in class and the impact they have on them and their learning. These two data collection strategies were also chosen as it would provide the study with both qualitative and quantitative data which Ivankova and Wingo (2018) suggest could provide a more rounded, concrete picture of the area of study.

## **Literature Review.**

According to Angelo and Cross (2005) assessment is 'an approach designed to help teachers find out what students are learning and how well they are learning it.' By extension, Popham (1999) suggests that classroom assessment should help teachers make better educational decisions.

It is generally theorised that there are two main types of assessment, formative and summative. According to Garrison and Ehringhaus (2011) summative assessments are tests and assessments regularly carried out to check students' knowledge and potential gaps in their knowledge. Garrison and Ehringhaus (2011) also suggest that formative assessments give students and teachers a clear comprehension of the work and their understanding. Similarly, Paul, Chris and Clara (2003, pp.1–52) suggest that when assessments are carried out and the data gathered reforms practice it is formative assessment and summative assessment informs future teaching and learning for the teacher.

This study is mainly looking into formative assessment strategies, Flórez and Sammons (2013) suggest that there are four overarching aspects to AFL, questioning, feedback, peer & self-assessment and formative use of summative assessment (success criteria). These aspects are widely accepted within the field.

Wragg and Brown (2002, pp.1–16) suggest that 'intelligent questioning is a valuable part of interactive teaching' however in contrast to this Wragg and Brown (2002, pp.1–16) also suggest that teachers must be skilled in handling pupil questions otherwise both pupils and their teachers will be unclear and could misinterpret the feedback making it inadequate. Similarly, to this, Cotton and United States. Office Of Educational Research and Improvement (2000) suggest that questioning acts as a teacher's instructions for what pupils need to do and how to achieve it.

Heitink et al. (2016) suggests that formative assessment aims to give teachers and pupils an insight into learning and can therefore inform structured feedback. On the other hand, Molloy et al. (2019) suggests that feedback sometimes does not meet the desired expectations set out by teachers.

Ndoye (2017) suggests that peer and self-assessment creates a supportive network for pupils to collaborate. While this can be beneficial in a classroom setting, J. Topping (2017) suggests that peer and self-assessment can be time consuming as it requires careful thought. This could suggest that taking time to peer and self-assess may pull away from other responsibilities in the classroom.

Fisher et al. (2018) suggests that when students are given success criteria, they understand that there is a learning objective and what their work should look like at the end. However, in contrast to this, Joyce and Spiller (2009) suggest that students will not automatically know how to use the success criteria to create the desired outcomes and will therefore need to be taught which can be very time consuming.

This research study is primarily focussing on the success criteria aspect of assessment for learning. Capel, Leask and Turner (2005) suggest that using success criteria gives the opportunity to provide students with written praise and encouragement which could have a positive impact on pupil confidence and further work. However, on the other hand, Harris and Clayton (2019) suggest that giving success criteria to pupils can focus the learning very specifically on a few expected outcomes, which could restrict the potential additional learning that could be gained from the lesson. Hattie (2012) suggests that success criteria can be used as a vehicle to move the learning along as once the pupils have completed their work, they can check it against the success criteria to see what they need to do next in their work. By extension, Race, Brown and Smith (2005, pp.149–156) suggest that if pupils cannot see where they have made mistakes in their work, they will be less motivated to improve their work as it will feel unclear and unachievable to them. Young (2013) suggests that giving pupils success criteria and allowing them to self-assess their work not only reinforces the pupils learning so far but can also save the teacher sometime during marking as they are only checking over the peer or self-assessment to ensure accuracy. In contrast to this, Chappuis (2004) suggests that using success criteria and allowing pupils to self-assess may not be exclusively trustworthy as many pupils can be too hard on themselves and mark themselves down when self-assessing.

## **Methodology.**

The aim of this research study was to investigate staff and pupils' experiences of using success criteria. Given the nature of the study, a staff questionnaire (see appendix 3) and pupil interviews (see appendix 5) were chosen as the research tools. As discussed above, this study followed the mosaic approach meaning that a mixed methods approach was required. Gillham (2008, p.33) suggests that using a questionnaire during a research study is beneficial as it allows the researcher to tailor the questions to discover specific information. This was a main contributing factor that led to questionnaires being used as the research tool as it enabled specifically worded questioning which could potentially lead to higher quality data being collected. However, Lambert (2019) highlights an important consideration

when using questionnaires which is the risk to participants of 'questionnaire fatigue'. This was taken into consideration when designing the questions. To limit the risk of questionnaire fatigue on the participants the questionnaire was limited to nine carefully considered questions. This allowed for the data to be gathered with a minimised risk to participants whilst still gathering the desired information. The other research tool chosen for this study was pupil interviews. O'Reilly and Dogra (2016) suggests that a key benefit to using pupil interviews over another research tool is that when worded correctly, interviews are accessible to many children including those who may have been unable to participate in other forms of research. This was a particularly relevant benefit to this specific research day as the pupils were randomly selected on the research day. Greig, Taylor and MacKay (2012) discuss types of interviews, their research had a paramount influence on the type of interview conducted. Greig, Taylor and MacKay (2012) suggest that a semi structured interview allows the researcher more flexibility while interviewing to expand on interesting answers and probe for clarification. Given the age of pupils and their potential ability levels, a semi structured interview was deemed the most appropriate and impactful tool to use.

This study was conducted on a research day in a school in Wales. The school is described as being a town school with approximately 468 pupils four to eleven years of age. As further context, 'around 9% of pupils are eligible for free school meals...around 17% of pupils have additional learning needs and most pupils are of white British ethnicity'. (Estyn, 2017). The school will be referred to as 'School A' to keep the school private, confidential, and anonymous. During the research day, six pupils were interviewed, two from each KS2 year group: 4,5 & 6. The staff questionnaire was also distributed by email via Microsoft forms to each teacher from the above classes. The qualitative data from the interviews included written notes from each interview which were later typed into transcripts (see appendix 6). The quantitative data from the staff questionnaire responses were generated into graphs via Microsoft forms (see appendix 4).

Various limitations arose as a result of this research day all of which will improve future research and practice. Firstly, very few teachers completed the online questionnaire which affects the reliability of the data as the sample size is small and limited. To improve on this the questionnaire could be sent to a larger sample group which may mean more replies. The questionnaire could also be sent with a longer deadline to give staff more time to answer. Secondly, it was possible that some pupils felt nervous or under pressure as the interviews were individually conducted. To improve on this in future research, interview sample groups could be created to give pupils more confidence when answering the interview questions. The sample size of six interviews is also a small-scale study so to increase reliability, a

higher number of interviews could be conducted. This was not possible in this instance as the research was conducted over the course of one school day. To further increase the validity of this research study, a triangulation of data collection methods could be used. Flick (2018) suggests that triangulation of data collection methods refers to using multiple methods to collect data. For this research study it may have been beneficial to have a triangulation of data collected from the staff questionnaires, the pupil interviews and potentially an observation of using success criteria in the classroom.

Throughout this research study, the ethical guidelines for educational research as published by the British Educational Research Association (BERA) were adhered to. Prior to the research day an ethics form (see appendix 1) was created and approved. This ethics form ensured that the research day was carefully considered, limiting risk to the participants wherever possible and also ensured that all relevant ethical considerations were adhered to. A consent form (see appendix 2) was also completed by the headteacher of school A and the researcher upon arrival of the research day. After gaining consent from the headteacher, as per the BERA (2019) guidelines 'participants whose age may limit the extent to which they can be expected to understand or agree voluntarily to participate' each pupil was asked to give assent verbally. The pupils were regularly asked if they were still happy to continue with the interview and reminded of their right to withdraw at any time. The pupils and staff were also made aware of how the data collected would be used. Upon entry of the online questionnaire a disclaimer stated that data would be collected anonymously, kept confidential and only used for the research study. The pupils were informed before starting the interview that their name would not be written down and their answers would only be used in the context of a research study essay. The pupils were also asked at the end of the interview if they were still happy for their answers to be used and reminded that their name would not be used (BERA, 2019). The BERA (2019) guidelines also state that keeping participants' data confidential and anonymous is a standard practice in educational research. This was adhered to during data collection as the questionnaire responses were recorded anonymously and kept confidential and data collected during transcription was anonymised as pupil A/B/C etc and kept confidential.

## **Findings and discussion.**

Before discussing the findings of the research day, it is paramount to highlight again that very few teacher questionnaire responses were able to be collected and the pupil interview sample consisted of only six pupils. This is relevant as according to Conrad and Serlin

(2006, p.505) larger sample sizes usually indicate what the generally accepted thought on a topic may be. Although, according to Hackshaw (2008) small sample research can be carried out quicker than a large sample which can also mean that the research question is addressed sooner. Almost all the data collected at some point discusses personal experiences of using success criteria. It can therefore be deduced that at least in this instance success criteria is used frequently in school A.

During this section, reference will be made to the questions answered in the teacher questionnaires, please see appendix 4 for reference throughout. Following the collection of the quantitative questionnaire data, it became apparent that success criteria was being used by two out of the three teachers with two teachers finding their listed strategies strongly affective and one finding their strategies somewhat affective. Question 3 on the questionnaire asked the teacher to justify their above statements, two out of three discussed how success criteria allows the pupils to understand what is expected of them which reinforces the work of Fisher et al. (2018) as discussed in the literature review above. One teacher discussed verbal feedback with more importance which could link to the work of Heitink et al. (2016) who discussed the benefit of giving informed structured feedback. Following on from this, question 4 asked how often success criteria is used as an AFL strategy, one teacher selected daily, and one teacher selected 2-3 times per week. This reinforces the answers given to question 1 & 2 of the staff questionnaires (see appendix 4). One teacher selected infrequently to question four which could indicate that possibly this class are using other AFL strategies that better suit their learning needs. Question 5 asks for examples of how teachers share success criteria. Two out of three teachers discussed putting success criteria on the class whiteboard and developing/discussing it as a class. This underpins the work of Young (2013) as discussed in the literature review above where it is suggested that allowing pupils to self-assess using a success criteria reinforces their own understanding and learning. Teacher three raises an interesting point in their answer to question 5 as they discuss success criteria not being as affective due to a widening gap in necessary differentiation. This supports the idea raised by Joyce and Spiller (2009) in the literature review that students will not automatically understand how to use success criteria and will need to be taught how to use it which can be time consuming, leading to it being less affective. Question 6 asked whether pupils refer to their success criteria throughout a lesson, two teachers answered a score of two out of ten and six out of ten. This suggests that generally pupils are less likely to refer to their success criteria. On a similar line of questioning, question 7 asked how does success criteria help pupils recognise when they have been successful. Two teachers discussed their classes as having the opportunity to check and self-assess their work against the success criteria. This directly supports the work

of Hattie (2012) who suggested that success criteria can be used to move the learning along by pupils checking their work against the success criteria and being able to see what they can do next. One teacher stated that success criteria helps their pupils to see when they have been successful only in certain topics or lessons. This could underpin the work of Harris and Clayton (2019) who state that success criteria can specifically focus the learning on a few particular learning outcomes. Question 8 asks the participants how proficient learners are in using success criteria, two teachers stated average, one stated proficient. This could further support the work of Fisher et al. (2018) as it could suggest that pupils understand how to use success criteria and what is expected of them. The final question 9 asked the participants about the challenges pupils face when using success criteria. One teacher stated that their class need reminding of the success criteria on the whiteboard. One teacher stated that some younger pupils can find success criteria difficult to understand. This further supports the ideas of Joyce and Spiller (2009) suggesting that pupils will not automatically understand the success criteria or how to use it. One teacher stated that differentiation and pupils feeling unsuccessful are challenges to using success criteria. This could support the theory proposed by Race, Brown, and Smith (2005, pp.149–156) that if pupils cannot see the errors in their work, then they will not be motivated to improve as it will feel unachievable to them.

Overall, the questionnaires provided an insight into using success criteria in the classroom, giving potential strengths and limitations to implementing this AFL strategy. Practical examples of the schools of thought discussed in the literature review were also provided. The data has also suggested that not one AFL strategy suits all and it is imperative to do what suits each classroom.

During this section, reference will be made to the questions asked and answered in the pupil interviews, please see appendix 5 for the questions and appendix 6 for the transcripts for reference throughout. Following the collection of the qualitative interview data some common themes arose relating to the data gathered from the questionnaires. Some of which is discussed in this next section. Question 1 ‘what helps you when you’re doing work in class?’ had a wide variety of answers including my teacher and class displays. This suggests that this question may not have been specific enough when the desired outcome was to discuss AFL strategies however, the data is still valid and still gives information about the participants experiences. Question 2 ‘how does success criteria help with your work?’ brought up the common theme of having a success criteria slip or skill slip that helps the students understand what they need to do. This underpins the earlier mentioned work of

Hattie (2012) & Fisher et al. (2018) who both discuss learners using success criteria to know how to complete their work. Question 3 asked 'do you/how do you use success criteria to check/improve your work?'. The common theme came up that the skills slips have an area where the teacher can mark and leave a comment for pupils to improve their work. It also came up frequently that pupils were able to self-assess their work. This correlates with the work mentioned in the literature review by Capel, Leask, and Turner (2005) who suggest that using success criteria give the opportunity to provide students with written praise and encouragement which can boost pupil confidence. Building on this, Young (2013) also suggested that allowing pupils to mark their work can save the teacher on marking time. Question 4 asked the pupils 'do you understand success criteria?'. The overarching theme was that generally pupils understand the success criteria and if they don't their teacher explains it to them. One participant stated that they do not understand because they don't know what the skill slip says. Most pupils answered question 5 'how does your teacher help you to understand the success criteria?' by stating that the teacher explains it in a way they understand. One participant stated that their teacher doesn't explain it to them. Question 6 asked the participants if they refer back to success criteria, some participants stated that some topics require them to look back, in particular maths and literacy. However, some participants stated that they do not usually refer back. This could potentially underpin the above-mentioned work by Hattie (2012) which describes success criteria as being the vehicle to moving work along.

Overall, the interviews gave an insight into the participants experiences of using success criteria. Generally, the data suggests that using success criteria is usually clear and helpful for most students however some participants discussed their struggles with using success criteria which further cements the idea that one AFL strategy does not suit all learners.

## **Conclusion.**

To conclude, the aim of this research study was to investigate pupil and staff experiences of using assessment for learning, in particular success criteria in the classroom. The data collected has allowed me an insight into how staff share success criteria and how they support learners to use it. The data also allowed me to see this from the pupil's perspective which has highlighted a few key points that I will take forward for my own practice. This study will improve my professional learning as it has given me an extended knowledge into assessment for learning and the potential strengths and limitations of using different AFL strategies in the classroom. It has also allowed me to see AFL from the learner's point of view which could mitigate some of the potential imitations in the future.

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Jessica Gethin  
2104002  
BA2

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Jessica Gethin  
2104002  
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Jessica Gethin  
2104002  
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