

Targed/Target 1	Try to expand your reading further and to be consistent in the depth of your discussion.
Targed/Target 2	Try to maintain and develop this criticality.
Targed/Target 3	Try to maintain and develop this element of your writing.

What are staff and pupil perceptions of Assessment for Learning (AFL)

What are teacher and pupil perceptions of peer and self-assessment?

The chosen strand of feedback to focus on for this assignment is peer and self-assessment and how these strategies are used within the classroom. The aim is to find out the perceptions of the teachers and pupils relating to self and peer-assessment and whether or not there is a difference in opinion. Both strategies are widely used in the classroom and there is a discussion to be had about which one is of more benefit to the children's learning. These strategies aim to increase independence and to get the children involved in the feedback stage to ensure that they understand what they can do to improve for next time. Boud (1995:17) states that "self-assessment is about developing their skills... It is not primarily about individual giving themselves marks or grades. And it is not about supplanting the role of teachers". If used correctly self-assessment can be a very beneficial strategy as it promotes self-reflection and independence. Also, the use of peer-assessment is a useful approach as it provides the children with collaborative skills when working with a partner and "can develop transferable skills for life" (Winter, 2009). As part of this assignment three research tools will be used to obtain information about the perceptions of teacher and pupil relating to peer and self-assessment. The hypothesis for this research task is that children and teachers feel that peer assessment is more beneficial to the pupil's learning. This prediction draws on past teaching experiences and witnessing how pupils react to both strategies in the classroom. The chosen research tools are questionnaires, interviews and observations. Three methods have been chosen to ensure that there is a vast perspective from pupils and teachers. As a result, a large sample of data will be collected and will be able to provide a synopsis of the feelings towards peer and self-assessment.

It could be argued that Assessment for Learning (AFL) is an integral part of the teaching profession. Therefore, the ability to include different AFL strategies in a lesson is essential to

the way that children develop and learn. The use of AFL in the classroom can be beneficial for both the pupils and the teachers. The children receive on the spot feedback of how to improve and the teacher obtains key information about their pupils which can be used to effectively develop their understanding and learning. The Assessment Reform Group (2002) define AFL as:

“the process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners and their teachers to decide where the learners are in their learning where they need to go next, and how best to get them there”.

There are a variety of AFL strategies that are used in the classroom. The focus strategies for this research task are peer and self-assessment and how the teachers and pupils feel about these methods. As mentioned previously, self-assessment is a widely used approach used in schools in a variety of ways. Common methods of self-assessment are ‘proofreading’, ‘checklists’ and ‘traffic lights’ etc. It aims to develop independence through reflection of the pupil’s own work. Donaldson (2015) enforces the use of self-assessment in the classroom: “By reflecting on their understanding and performance in relation to clear criteria, they can identify areas of difficulty that might not be easily seen by an external observer”. The importance of the use of self-assessment in classroom activities is comprehensive as it shows whether the child knows where they are going wrong. Also, if they do it from a young age, children will be able to build on these foundations throughout their school lives and into adulthood resulting in a more rounded individual. Therefore, an appropriate use of self-assessment could lead to “entering a growth-pathway in which students identify and respond to their weaknesses, instead of pursuing an ego-protection pathway in which students seek to maximise unmerited positive feelings about their work” (Boekaerts & Corno, 2005). However, there are many factors that affect if the use of self-assessment produces successful or disappointing results. One factor is whether the child is able to accurately mark their work avoiding bias. Brown & Harris (2013) emphasise the need for “realistic or verifiably accurate self-assessment if it is to effectively contribute to achievement”. Also, the teacher’s perception towards self-assessment and how it is used within the class can seriously affect the value of it. Depending on which strategies the teacher uses there could be some drawbacks. Cowie (2009) states that “there are strong psychological pressures on students that lead to dissembling and dishonesty”. This suggests that if a child feels insecure about their level of understanding they may change their answer to imply that they have understood. As a result, the teacher may not get a clear perspective of the whole class. Consequently, the use of self-assessment brings with it some positives and some drawbacks and the role of the teacher is to ensure that the strategies are in place to ensure that self-

assessment is able to prosper to guarantee child development. The other chosen AFL strategy for this research task is peer-assessment. Common methods of peer-assessment are strategies such as 'think-pair-share' and 'two stars and a wish'. The aim of peer-assessment is to develop co-operative skills through learning with a partner or group. It aims to provide children with the chance to work collaboratively as a team to share ideas or to achieve a goal. Stefani (1994) states that "peer-assessment improves pupils' motivation to work more carefully and can help you think more". Echoing what Stefani (1994) believes Grigg (2010) agrees and he states that "children generally accept criticisms more readily from their peers than from their teachers". Figure 1 shows Hattie's (2009) list of influences on learning and it states that Classroom discussion has an effect size of 0.82.

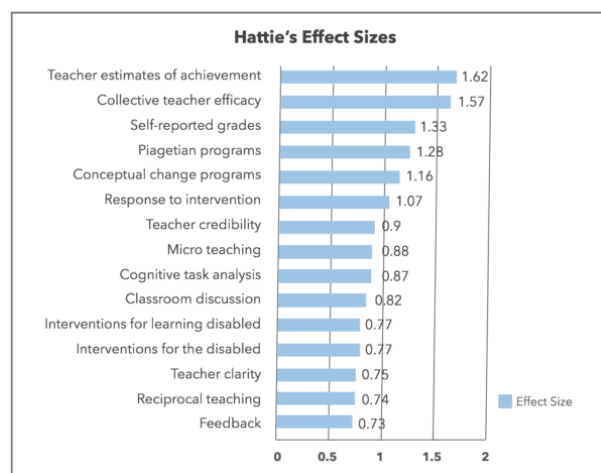


Figure 1- Hattie (2009) list of influences on learning.

It could be debated that the most widely used peer-assessment strategy is think-pair-share/talk partners. Clarke (2014) states that "talk partners allow children not only time to think after a question is asked, but a chance to articulate their thinking". Also, through the use of mixed ability pairs learning is promoted further. Clarke (2014) argues that "if paired with a higher achiever, children have opportunities to learn which they might never had if placed with a 'matched' partner". This is in line with Vygotsky's (1958) concept of the 'more knowledgeable other' (MKO). Vygotsky (1958) refers to the tendency to over-mark which usually occurs in cases where students had "no anonymity and were reluctant to be seen to be penalizing their fellow students". The MKO is an individual who has a better understanding and is able to provide support to the learner. This promotes learning for the less able pupil. However, there are some drawbacks that are associated with the use of peer-assessment. There is an argument that children are susceptible to excessive lenience when marking, especially if they are marking a friend's work. However, Vickerman (2009) argues that "the tendency to over-mark usually occurs in cases where students had no

anonymity and were reluctant to be seen to be penalizing their fellow students". Therefore, it is the teacher's responsibility to ensure that peer assessment is being used effectively in the classroom to develop the children's learning.

The research was conducted in an urban school within an affluent area. The school consists of 226 pupils and approximately 3.2% of children receive free school meals. This is well below the average for primary schools in the country. The school has identified roughly 3% of its pupils as having additional learning needs which again is significantly below the average.

Before undertaking any research, ethical considerations have to be taken into account. Aubrey et al (2000:156) define ethics as, "the moral philosophy or set of moral principles underpinning a project". As a result, an ethics form and consent form had to be completed prior to the research day (which can be found in appendix 1). The purpose of the ethics form is to minimise risk of harm for the participants and the researcher and to ensure that the research is conducted in an ethical fashion. BERA (2018) believes that "educational researchers should operate within an ethic of respect for any persons-including themselves-involved in or touched by the research they are undertaking".

As mentioned previously, there were three research tools used to obtain data as part of the research day. The aim of the research tools was to collect data concerning the perceptions of both teacher and student regarding peer and self-assessment. The questionnaire was aimed to target teacher perceptions. A copy of the questionnaire was distributed to each class teacher throughout the school to ensure that there was a clear coverage of the whole school. Kumar (2014:177) defines a questionnaire as "a written list of questions, the answers to which are recorded by respondents". The researcher chose to use questionnaires as they are a "versatile and cost-effective research tool" (Walliman, 2001). The purpose of a questionnaire is to obtain quantitative data. Therefore, it collects data in a numerical form which can be categorised and used to make graphs. The questions on a questionnaire "can broadly be divided into those that are open-ended and those that are closed" (Tymms, 2012:232). A closed question looks for specific facts and often only requires one answer which can be yes or no. This method of questioning "can facilitate the analysis of large amounts of data" (Tymms, 2012) and as a result the researcher included a variety of different types of closed questions such as the 'Likert scale' and multiple choice. This meant that some of the questions on the questionnaire were simple to answer and respondents could take more time to think about their answers to the open-ended answers and provide more coherent answers. An open-ended question refers to the questions that provokes

deeper thinking and requires reasoning behind the answer. Tymms (2012) states that this type of questioning “allows respondents free rein”. It provides the researcher with more in-depth answers which can be used to fully gauge the perceptions. However, it is essential that a questionnaire consists of both open and closed questions to ensure that the length is of an appropriate nature. If the questionnaire is too long “respondents may lose interest and they may start ticking boxes without thinking-generating a response set” (Tymms, 2012). Welsh Government (2015) states that when conducting a questionnaire, it can be “difficult to validate trustfulness of answers”. To combat this the respondents were not required to state their names which may have provided the teachers with a sense of freedom to answer the questions more honestly. In turn this ensured confidentiality of respondents which meant that the questionnaires were ethically sound.

The second research tool chosen was a class observation. The purpose of the observation was to examine the use of peer and self-assessment in the classroom and to obtain a first-hand practical experience of teacher and pupil perceptions. This particular form of observation is known as ‘naturalistic observation’ and can be split into three categories: ‘unobtrusive, reactive and participant’. The researcher chose to focus on a ‘reactive’ approach. Angrosino (2012) describes reactive observation as “researchers do identify themselves and explain their intentions; they may also intervene in the action, although they try to do so in their role as social scientists”. This form of observation was chosen as it most suited the situation as the researcher had already spent time in the chosen class. This meant that the researcher was able to build on past relationships to gain a deeper understanding of their perceptions. An observation schedule was used to monitor the use of self and peer-assessment throughout the lesson (a copy of which can be found in the appendix 2). However, before undertaking the observation the participants were “made aware that research was taking place and that it has certain definable processes and expected outcomes... and their anonymity will be protected” (Angrosino, 2012). As mentioned previously the use of observation as a research tool provides the researcher with actual experiences to obtain a comprehensive perspective of how children respond to self and peer assessment. Though, there is a potential for observer bias as the method is subjective. As a result, some observations may be deemed unreliable as “observers are different. They all have different life experiences or ‘brought selves’ and these differences affect what they focus on when they are observing” (Reinharz, 1997).

The third research tool chosen was an interview. Johnson and Christensen (2012:198) define an interview as “a data collection method in which an interviewer asks an interviewee questions”. An interview can be used to collect either quantitative or qualitative data

depending on the approach taken by the interviewer. They could either take the positivism or interpretivist approach. Mukherji and Albon (2015) state that:

“positivism usually leads to a choice of quantitative methodology and is primarily concerned with obtaining data that can be converted into numbers... interpretivist research, although different, tends to lead to a choice of qualitative methodology”.

Prior to the investigation, the researcher designed a list of various questions related to peer and self-assessment that would be used during the interview process. There were six children (three girls and three boys) chosen to be a part of the interviews. The researcher aimed to target the different perceptions in the class, therefore, two children from each ability group were chosen. To ensure that each pupil felt considered, the researcher explained what the investigation was about and asked for volunteers. However, the chosen children did not have to participate in the interview and were given the opportunity to withdraw. BERA (2018) states that: “voluntary informed consent will be obtained at the start of the study, and researchers will remain sensitive and open to the possibility that participants may wish to withdraw their consent”. There are many reasons which indicate that the use of interviews can be beneficial to conduct effective research. Opdenakker (2006) states that “the interviewer and interviewee can directly react on what the other says or does. An advantage of this is that the answer of the interviewee is more spontaneous”. Conversely, “a student could potentially obtain the views of many more people using a questionnaire than interviewing” (Mukherji and Albon, 2015).

As a result of the investigation a wide range of data was collected using the three research tools mentioned. The researcher conducted a semi-structured interview asking pupils questions which had been prepared before-hand. Six children were chosen, but the children understood that participation was not obligatory and one of them refused to participate. Also, the children were given the opportunity to withdraw from the interview process through the use of a red lollipop stick. If the child did not wish to proceed, they could show the red lollipop stick and the researcher would stop the interview. The interviews were conducted individually as the researcher felt that the answers given would be more sincere. The aim was to gauge the perceptions of the pupils relating to peer and self-assessment. The researcher asked seven questions and there were a range of responses from the interviews (a copy of which can be found in appendix 3). One of the questions that the children were asked was:

“Between peer and self-assessment which one do you think is more beneficial for your learning and why?”.

Five out of six children stated that they preferred peer-assessment. 'Child D' declared that "it helps to talk with someone because you can help each other". This supports Clarke (2014) who states that "talk partners allow children not only time to think after a question is asked, but a chance to articulate their thinking". The majority of the opinions gained during the interviews reinforced the researcher's hypothesis that children and teachers feel that peer assessment is more beneficial to the pupil's learning. However, 'Child C' favoured self-assessment saying, "I rather mark my own work". This reinforces Ross' (2006) research that states that pupils preferred self-assessment as it "enabled them to communicate information about their performance that was not otherwise available to their teacher". Overall, the use of interviews ensured that a range of responses were collected, and the researcher was able to discover the thoughts of the pupils in an efficient process. However, if the researcher had more time, they could interview a larger collection of pupils to ensure further validity in the data collection.

As mentioned previously, the researcher used a questionnaire to determine the views of the teachers relating to peer and self-assessment. It was distributed to each class teacher (seven in total) to ensure a wide range of data covered both Key Stage 2 and Foundation Phase. The questionnaire consisted of seven questions regarding peer and self-assessment (a copy of the questionnaire and the responses can be found in appendix 4). The researcher used an assortment of open and closed questions using different forms of closed questions to ensure that the respondent was engaged throughout. This is in line with Tymms (2012), who states that if the questionnaire is tedious "respondents may lose interest and they may start ticking boxes without thinking-generating a response set". The questionnaire was completed online using 'Microsoft Forms' which meant that collecting the data was a simple process. Also, this meant that it was less time-consuming during the investigation day as the researcher was able to send the questionnaire to the relevant staff members and concentrate on collecting data using the other research tools. Figure 2 shows that 86% of respondents stated that they use peer-assessment "weekly". However, Figure 3 displays that when asked how frequently they use self-assessment there was more of a mixture of opinions.

How often do you use peer assessment in your lessons?

[More Details](#)

Never	0
Rarely	0
Weekly	6
Daily	1
Every lesson	0



Figure 2 shows how often the respondents use peer-assessment.

How often do you use self assessment in your lessons?

[More Details](#)

Never	0
Rarely	2
Weekly	2
Daily	2
Every lesson	1



Figure 3 shows how often the respondents use self-assessment.

Furthermore, when asked to comment on the effectiveness of the use of peer and self-assessment using a star method the response was identical. The average rating that the teachers gave for both strategies was 3.8 out of 5. The data collected underlines that there is a strong mixture of opinions relating to which strategy is more preferred by the participating teachers. However, figure 3 shows the respondents use self-assessment more frequently which might suggest that the participants feel that using self-assessment is more beneficial for their pupils. The questionnaires did not obtain a comprehensive answer to which strategy the teachers prefer. As a result, the findings contradict the chosen hypothesis. Overall, the use of questionnaires worked effectively to discover the perceptions of teachers. However, to ensure reliability and to improve results the researcher could conduct a 'pilot questionnaire' before-hand. Mukherji and Albon (2015) state that "it is unwise to send out a questionnaire without testing it out on a few people first. Respondents could be asked to record their thoughts as they are filling in the questionnaire".

The purpose of the observation was to gain valuable first-hand information about the class and how the pupils react to peer and self-assessment. As mentioned before, the researcher used an observation schedule to monitor the lesson. The sample size for the observation was 21 children however the researcher chose to primarily focus on four children (2 more able and 2 less able). This was to ensure that a range of pupils were being observed. A whole morning session was observed which gave the researcher the opportunity to witness a Mathematics and an English lesson. It proved very beneficial to see how the class teacher used different peer and self-assessment strategies for the two lessons. There was a series of different assessment strategies used for the two lessons and they both included peer and self-assessment. However, the literacy lesson consisted of more assessment strategies, such as 'think-pair-share', 'two stars and a wish', 'thumbs up, thumbs down' and checklists. The teacher did not use as many assessment strategies in the Mathematics lesson although 'think-pair-share' was utilised effectively during the lesson to gauge understanding. This suggests that the teacher believes that 'think-pair-share' is one of the most effective assessment strategies. The pupils work in mixed ability pairs to discuss their opinions on certain subjects. This supports Vygotsky's (1978) theory of the MKO which can be employed to either help the more able or less able child. The more able child can act as a model and they can share ideas to help the less able child develop. Also, the strategy can be used to benefit the learning of the more able child as it provides them with a sense of independence as they are able to act as an alternative teacher figure. Overall, the use of a whole class observation allowed the researcher to accurately perceive how the teacher used peer and self-assessment in the classroom. It provided a proficient way of understanding how the pupils reacted to the strategy. The evidence gained suggests that peer assessment was more frequently used, and the researcher found that the pupils responded better to this strategy. However, if the investigation was undertaken again, the researcher may involve another observer in the observation process as "different observers may interpret what they see in very different ways" (Coffey, 1999).

In conclusion, the importance of the use of peer and self-assessment is apparent and the findings from the research day echo this. However, in terms of which is perceived as more beneficial there is not a distinct answer, but the findings suggest that the teachers and pupils involved favoured the use of peer-assessment. This corresponds with the chosen hypothesis: "children and teachers feel that peer assessment is more beneficial to the pupil's learning". The inclusion of a research task targeting a specific aspect of classroom life, such as peer and self-assessment will prove beneficial especially for a trainee teacher in order to promote enhanced practise in the future. Primarily, it showed how important the use of peer and self-assessment is in order to develop a pupil's learning and to promote independence.

This relates to Donaldson (2015) who states that “both self-assessment and peer assessment should be developed as ways of encouraging children and young people to take greater responsibility for their own learning”. Overall, the investigation was a success and a plethora of valuable information was gained. However, for future investigations the researcher aims to spend a more prolonged time in a school to collect the data. This will ensure that a wider range of information is accumulated. The researcher could visit different classes or use a greater band of pupils or teachers which would ensure that the data is more reliable.

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