



NATIONAL PROFESSIONAL ENQUIRY PROJECT

YSGOL GYMRAEG CASNEWYDD FINAL REPORT 2019-2020

We decided to look at formative assessment as it is an integral part of the pedagogical principles, Curriculum for Wales, the professional standards, and is therefore central to our vision as a school. This became a strong foundation for our staff in planning together as well as the 4 Purposes.

Although we had investigated and started discussing effective questioning and assessment strategies, it was still necessary to monitor the situation and ask: were our changes too superficial and did the staff have sufficient understanding of the effective strategies to see an impact in learners' progress? This was, therefore, a clear driver for the enquiry route that will give our school its next direction.

Our question was: how can Assessment for Learning support learners as they become more independent in their understanding of progress.

As it was being discussed, it emerged that a qualitative methodology was necessary to the requirements. As a result, holding focus groups was the best way forward to provide an informed basis for the impact on questioning and response since our changes in September with regard to the SMT and other teaching staff. We also discussed that the focus needed to be on questioning instead of looking at formative assessment as a whole, to ensure depth.

Two focus groups were recorded – one with the SMT (Headteacher, FP Leader, KS2 Leader, Skills Leader and Deputy); one comprising of 6 diverse teachers in terms of experience, age, background and development.

In order to release 6 members of the teaching staff, a whole-school singing session was arranged in the school hall. The group's discussion lasted 25 minutes and all members participated well and confidently with examples and ideas.

In order to hold the focus group with the SMT, an after-school SMT meeting was held. The group discussed for 35 minutes, again with everyone participating with examples and ideas on how to extend or move forward.

Staff and SMT responses were extremely encouraging. There is a difference in the way teachers thought when planning and therefore the questioning in lessons was more purposeful. This also had a positive impact on the children's response when re-drafting.

We hoped we'd be able to continue with the enquiry in February 2020. We felt that there was a clear path for us to follow as a school:

- Although formative assessment systems to date are successful with teachers, what do learners think?
- Also look at effective questioning and written responses.
- Work together as a cluster in enquiry and find out what works well.

The enquiry was submitted to the cluster and it was decided to use assessment in a project to observe the heads of the cluster. Focusing the observations and



discussion that followed on formative assessment, a number of interesting points were shared among the headteachers. Most school observations were carried out before having to close down for Covid-19.

One important point I learned - although 'enquiry' and 'research' are words that can be daunting, they do not have to be complex. Enquiries can be simple and grow with confidence. You do not need to be an academic teacher for this to be a purposeful course of action.

As a school, we learned that our systems and ideas were good practice and that there was depth and understanding in what was discussed and implemented. We learned that we were on track to start small and build step by step.

There were some more challenging elements to the discussions:
Strategy modelling took time at first as children came to know new processes;
Simplifying strategies for the younger children can sometimes be challenging;
Ensuring consistency across the school can be challenging.

I would certainly recommend a professional enquiry to my colleagues but keep these points in mind:

- Think and discuss within the school what is important to you - what needs time and research in order to move the school forward in terms of your school targets - do not follow others or do something in order to 'tick the box'.
- Keep things simple, don't over-plan or try to do too much considering the time/staffing conditions in your school.
- Focus on a particular element – don't be too open-ended – to ensure depth and quality.
- Give participants time to look at the questions and deliberate.
- Think about the ethics in advance.
- Be creative in releasing members of staff – there is so little money.
- Be honest with your results and be prepared to feel disappointed – you cannot move and develop if you ignore uncomfortable truths.