

Effective Peer and Self Assessment

Rationale

Middlesbrough schools have been establishing the key essentials of peer and self assessment for some time now and the large majority of schools have successfully embedded elements of this in their classroom practice. However in many schools it has never truly reached its potential and has in some cases become 'grounded' in the basics. One reason for this is that we cannot always see its promise and its impact seems limited, this can be due to lack of experience, knowledge or training and therefore the motivation for pushing it further and exploring its possibilities, which takes time and effort, is essentially missing. In response, this review will firstly reflect on the importance and impact of peer and self assessment on children's attainment and then consider both current practice and available research before bringing together ideas to arrive at some conclusions on effective peer and self assessment.

The importance of Peer and Self Assessment

So why do we need to bring peer and self assessment into our classrooms? For this we only need to ask ourselves what type of learners we wish to promote. Most practitioners aspire to have independent learners who possess a clear understanding of their learning journey and can actively expand their own skills and knowledge, impacting on their progress. (NFER 2012) Their research concludes that peer and self assessment is one route to achieving this:

'Self and peer assessment are important aspects of assessment for learning practice... Assessing their own work or that of others can help pupils develop their understanding of learning objectives and success criteria. Research has shown that pupils make more progress when they are actively involved in their own learning and assessment.' (NFER 2012)

National Strategies material also supports the notion that self assessment '*promotes independent learning, helping children to take increasing responsibility for their own progress*' (National Strategies 2008); making it more meaningful and permanent.

Research from Black and Wiliam (1998) and Kings College has highlighted 4 reasons to make peer and self assessment a key component of learning:

- 1. To learn effectively pupils require good quality, continuous feedback. This is hard for teachers to manage whole class but through peer tutoring it is achievable.*
- 2. Peer and self assessment promotes metacognition in learners in that it helps them develop a deeper awareness of how they learn and promotes better learning.*
- 3. Pupil assessment can be more effective than teacher based marking as pupils listen more actively to each other.*
- 4. If learners can reflect accurately and honestly, the evidence can back up teacher's judgements and give an insight into pupil thinking.*

In turn then, peer and self assessment proves a valuable investment, a low cost/high impact approach (EEF Toolkit 2011). Its use creates motivated, independent learners that possess

an awareness of their learning, that drive their own development and who often make better progress than those who are not involved in peer and self assessment. Effective peer and self assessment can also facilitate teaching and make it easier for pupils to contribute to the setting and achieving of targets. (NFER 2012)

Current Practice

As previously stated, most schools have elements of peer and self assessment, normally as part of their Marking and Feedback policy. This generally takes the form of pupils reviewing their own and other's work in the light of clear success criteria, often following prompts or completing a tick list, indicating success on a scale (e.g. traffic lighting) or improving their work in response to teacher marking. Some schools also focus on conferencing sessions or DIRT which provides teachers with the opportunity to focus in on key skills or features within small groups and allows children to make significant improvements to work. Partner talk has been an easy introduction to peer assessment and is widely practised across Middlesbrough schools. It allows children to benefit from the opportunity to discuss their work with peers in terms of success and improvement whilst changing 'who is doing the talking'. The majority of marking policies include useful 'codes' for peer and self assessment which make it easier for children to use and understand. These approaches have all contributed to bringing peer and self assessment into daily learning and have shown that implemented well, peer and self assessment can greatly benefit our children.

Research/Best Practice

After researching a wide range of publications, websites and programmes looking at existing ideas and practices in effective peer and self assessment, the following principles recur throughout, proving vital to the process:

Preparation: Ensuring children have the necessary skills

National Strategies highlights the importance of preparing children for the process of peer and self assessment beforehand. It states that before effective assessment can occur we need to develop children's skills in self awareness, their listening skills, questioning skills and their ability to empathise and manage feelings, only then can they maximise the benefits of peer and self assessment. Thinking for Learning (Principles of Peer and Self Assessment) research highlights the need for pupils to be taught the skills of collaboration and evaluative language in preparation and states that developing peer and self assessment orally before anything written, is essential in order to avoid children becoming caught up in what they need to record rather than what they can gain. This is echoed in material published by NFER who also highlight the importance of an effective 'classroom culture or ethos where errors are valued as learning opportunities and admitting to not understanding is acceptable'.

Modelling: Establishing the goals

Wider research has also agreed on the need for excellent modelling of the assessment process before children can implement it. Modelling for the whole class and 'thinking aloud' whilst editing pieces of work, identifying successes 'provides pupils with a clear model and with the necessary language' National Strategies (2008). NFER has seconded this and suggested that moving first from whole class modelling to peer assessment and then self

evaluation means that 'pupils will find it easier to identify weaknesses in their own work'. Also Shirley Clarke (2008) found that 'looking at the work of others can ...help pupils to understand the different approaches they could have taken...that there are different ways of achieving success.' She develops this by stating that, although this is the correct order of progression, these separate elements need to come together as a whole process rather than developed independently of one another over a number of sessions. In her publications she suggests that learning should move from 'shared' modelling of evaluation to 'peer' and then 'self' evaluation during the course of a single dedicated session.

Practice: Putting things into action

In daily practice peer and self assessment is found to work best when specific opportunities are planned in or are in response to an identified need. This is of course already part of general practice for some however the execution and commitment is the key to its effectiveness and impact. Developing skill sets and modelling the process have been identified as essential in the beginning, to establish expectations and standards. The critical sharing of clear success criteria to assess against is also a familiar concept to those already accessing peer and self assessment, however making the setting of criteria the responsibility of the children and allowing them to do that by critiquing a model example of the focus genre or text is less so. S.Clarke (2008) promotes this concept, asking the children to share/peer evaluate a set text before writing so that the pupils can see what success 'looks like' and from this set their own criteria and therefore aim to reach standards and expectations, is more effective. Later, when peer and self evaluating, this then becomes more meaningful and the very fact that the pupils have set the initial success criteria means that they will have had more chance of including it in the first place. This is the start of independence in setting the expectations for their own learning and allows the children to assess to what extent they have met their standards.

S.Clarke (2008) acknowledges that the introduction of peer and self assessment began with simple ways of pupils deciding how well they had done on a piece of work e.g. traffic lights, or swapping work and marking it and in many cases it remained at this level. This she clarified was typically an 'end point evaluation', retrospective, as was editing in response to teacher marking; in many ways it 'fell too late to have any lasting effect on the pupils working process or the quality of the piece as a whole'. The use of prompts has also been established as a common feature of current practice; these often take the varied form of 'find one thing you are proud of and highlight it' and 'find one thing you/your partner can improve'. This in itself gives the children time to focus in on their work or the work of others but again is generally part of an 'end point evaluation'. End of session plenaries similarly indicated required improvements after the fact. She further states that in fact good evaluation which can have a lasting impact on the quality of the whole piece needs to be constant '*as learning is happening* so that changes can be made..while the work is in progress rather than retrospectively'. She calls this approach 'integrated' peer and self evaluation.

S.Clarke suggests that beginning with a whole class review of a suitable model example allows the children to be involved in the creation of relevant success criteria and identify not only what is a 'good' feature but also 'why' it is a good feature. From the beginning then children are armed with detailed knowledge of how to succeed. In identifying areas for improvement as a whole group they can also take on board the concept of analysing and

look at 'how' to develop work. As Black and Wiliam (1998) discovered, this is a good way of allowing children to 'internalise' the success criteria 'giving rise to a deeper level of understanding that can be transferred to his/her own work'; through this process and effective peer assessment children will learn to 'steer' their work 'in light of certain aims'.

As established, moving from whole class modelling to peer assessment is generally revered as the logical step before self evaluation, this is possibly because peer assessing is less 'emotionally charged' allowing children to analyse work objectively (Education Scotland-The journey to Excellence). S.Clarke also encourages this: echoing, in pairs, what has been done as a whole class, part way through the session, provides a model of 'personalised learning' in that it focuses on individual strengths and weaknesses. This is peer asesment at its most effective, supporting a partner when the learning is 'still happening' and the individual child still has the opportunity to 'do something about it'. After whole group/class and peer assessment, self evaluation becomes a practised skill they can apply effectively as the learning occurs, recognising areas of strength and making changes to improve the overall quality. This 'integrated' assessment has a greater impact than 'end point evaluations' and involves less adult intervention and dependence.

Thinking for Learning research also refers to the effective use of the learning environment as a large factor in peer and self evaluation. Displaying such good examples and key features for success means that during peer and self evaluation children continue to have the model example to refer to and amend in light of. Many schools currently have this in the form of a 'working wall' or 'english/maths wall' varieties.

In conclusion

Currently many schools have peer and self assessment elements which, when implemented fully, prove effective such as talk partners, clear success criteria, quality teacher marking providing feedback and action points and clear use of prompts to question and evaluate work. However the research done here shows that there are clear ways of expanding this practice so that it increases the impact and supports an addition or alternative to 'end point, retrospective evaluations' with a more 'integrated' approach that utilises peer and self assessment *as the learning is happening*, whilst the child still has the opportunity to redirect or develop the initial quality of the piece of work. This is certainly something to be mindful of as we consider teacher assessment for writing standards.

In practice, effective peer and self assessment against a dedicated piece of writing may look something along the lines of the following:

1. Modelling of assessment process through **whole class** evaluation of a model example. From this children identify areas of success, leading to a clear set of success criteria and expectations.
2. After a short period of writing time, children **peer assess** work in pairs in reference to the established success criteria. Again identify success and then look at areas for improvement to be followed up by the writer as they continue. This provides another opportunity to internalise the success criteria before returning to complete work.

3. Further on, children to review work and **self evaluate** against the success criteria once more. The pupil has at this point been through the process more than once and has clarity over what is expected. Any amendments to the work to improve quality can now happen before it is finalised.
4. 'End point evaluation' often done in plenaries can then be out in place to indicate overall success of the piece.
5. Teacher marking will then produce further feedback in terms of achievement and areas for development which children can address in dedicated response time (editing time, conferencing, DIRT etc).

This process is not necessarily something that would be required for every piece of work in every session, but when the opportunity arises for peer and self assessment and there is a benefit to be had, this could prove an effective, comprehensive approach.

Research Publications/Websites:

CETL Assessment Resources Centre (<http://ar.cetl.hku.hk>)

DfE Teaching and Learning Resources, The National Archives

Education Scotland – The Journey to Excellence, Self and Peer Assessment
(www.journeytoexcellence.org.uk)

National Strategies 2008 (archived)

NFER - Getting to grips with assessment: Primary (updated 2012)

NTEAZ (North Tyneside Education Action Zone) – Using peer and self assessment in the primary classroom (<http://growthmindseteaz.org>)

Paul Black & Dylan Wiliam (1998) Inside the black box, Raising standards through classroom assessment

Queen's University Belfast (qub.ac.uk) Peer and Self Assessment research

Shirley Clarke (2008) – Active Learning Through Formative Assessment

The Sutton Trust-EEF Teaching and Learning Toolkit (2011)

Thinking for Learning, Principles for Learning (www.thinkingforlearning.com)

Teachers Media (www.teachersmedia.co.uk)