

The Impact of Assessment for Learning on Pupil Writing

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Abstract

This action research study sought to investigate the impact of Assessment for Learning (AfL) on pupils' writing and self-assessment skills. The study was conducted over five months with twenty-three third class girls. Phase one consisted of lessons on handwriting, punctuation and four genres of writing. Exemplars were used to communicate learning intentions and to generate success criteria. Checklists, the Two Stars and a Wish technique and talk partners facilitated self and peer-assessment. The pupils compiled writing portfolios, the items for which were self-selected. These items were accompanied by written reflection tags in which the pupils explained their choices. In phase two these portfolios were used at four pupil-involved parent-teacher meetings. A teacher diary, pupil questionnaire, pupil and parent interviews provided the data on the impact of AfL on the pupils' writing and assessment skills.

Increased lesson time and preparation time combined with a sense of struggle were noted by the author as she sought to implement the AfL strategies. This was counter-balanced by improved teacher-pupil collaboration. The pupils indicated that they enjoyed the techniques used to facilitate the AfL strategies and found talk partners to be the most helpful technique. The approach taken to implement the Two Stars and a Wish technique had a negative emotional impact initially and had to be amended. With the exceptions of two of the pupils, all indicated that they were comfortable with self-assessment. In addition parents reported that self-assessment was a new feature of their children's homework practices.

The participants' responses to the pupil-involved parent-teacher meetings were generally positive although three of the four parents expressed the view that there remained place for the traditional parent-teacher meetings in cases where sensitive issues needed to be discussed. The parents observed that the process was enjoyable, empowering, transparent and motivating for their children. Furthermore, the parents valued the meetings as opportunities to learn more about classroom practices and their children's learning. They also appreciated the fact that they had increased awareness of their children's individuality and of AfL as a way of generating a more positive learning environment.