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'Modifying Classroom Assessment and Recording
Practices in preparation for the Proposed Pupil
Profile'

GTCNI Bursary Report
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Professional Development Activity (PDA)

The introduction in September 2007 of the N Ireland revised skills based curriculum will by implication involve practitioners in the assessment and recording of new skills related to the areas of learning as detailed in the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2006.

The Task Group on Assessment and Testing (TGAT) report DES 1988 was the publication which first ignited my interest in formative assessment. Since then my belief has been that quality assessment is the core of quality education and the link between quality teaching and quality learning. I also believe that teachers should record their assessments of children's learning in a practical and manageable manner in order to feed into class reports and make them more reliable. Identifying a PDA related to assessment/recording and the revised curriculum was therefore relatively easy.

There were four different aspects to my PDA.

- i.) Reading pertinent research literature by acknowledged experts such as Professor Black, the Assessment Reform Group, summaries of action-research projects carried out by Shirley Clarke and CCEA publications.
- ii.) Meeting with a member of the Inspectorate and with CCEA and Education and Library Board personnel involved with Assessment for Learning (AfL).
- iii.) Observing a P6/P7 teacher who was involved in researching AfL for CCEA in preparation for future P1 and P5 teacher training.
- iv.) Carrying out classroom based action-research.

Improved Practice

Prior to being awarded my bursary, I had already been attempting to implement some aspects of AfL in my classroom but as separate elements and so in isolation from one another. The combination of learning from the theory, research projects related to AfL and of future Northern Ireland requirements highlighted the need for me to look holistically at the essential elements of formative assessment.

- Shared learning outcomes
- Shared success criteria
- More effective questioning techniques
- Self-assessment by pupils
- Peer assessment
- Feedback

As my action-research evolved, the more I focussed on

- shared learning outcomes
- shared success criteria
- self-assessment by pupils

I included them as part of two computer programs which each child completed.

As I observed and reflected on the changes I was making to the classroom culture, the more my practice improved because a light had been switched on! I was actually beginning to understand how the combined elements of AfL were starting to improve the children's learning and the relationships between me and the children.

The more enlightened I became as to how they dovetailed to improve learning, the greater my interest and enthusiasm in AfL increased.

Benefits for the children

- provided opportunities for the children to be actively involved in and to take more responsibility for their learning
- Motivated them to find out more information and so encouraged independent learning
- Allowed the children to self-assess their own learning. Using strategies like 'traffic lights' and 'two stars and a wish' related to shared success criteria also focussed them on not only what they had learned but also what they still needed to learn.
- Developed the children's communication skills and gave them better knowledge and ownership of their own learning.
- Better self-esteem/confidence
- Improved relationships between the children
- Gave them opportunities to develop personal/ interpersonal skills, thinking skills and become more knowledgeable about our world. All elements of the revised curriculum!

Observing my class and analysing conversations with the children about their learning and about the changes I was making confirmed that my PDA was having an effect on their learning.

The children also made interesting comments when after drawing up success criteria on how successful I had been in my PDA , I allowed them to feedback to me using the 'two stars and a wish strategy' !

One boy also typed a very impressive opinion of AfL in terms of what he thought about his own learning but also clearly confirmed my own evaluation of the effect my PDA was having on the children's learning. (His critical reflections follow this report!)

Sharing With Colleagues

This GTC web-site is perhaps the most effective way to share my experiences with other colleagues. In the future, it may be possible to share my reflections of AfL with colleagues in school. Being a member of the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) should also enable me to reach a wider audience through local and UK wide Union publications.

Reflection

Reflecting on the four aspects of my PDA confirmed and /or enlightened me to the following:

- Assessment is integral to the teaching and learning cycle
- Reading pertinent literature and CCEA publications was very thought provoking, interesting, encouraging and challenging!
- Being able to observe another practitioner was extremely insightful, as I was able see theory and practice coming together.
- My action-research activities were most enlightening as I realised AfL motivated, involved the children in their own learning and has the potential to improve their learning
- As I came to a better understanding of the concept so too came the realisation that AfL could indeed raise standards related to the N Ireland revised skills based curriculum
- Unfortunately, at present there is no advice available as to how practitioners should moderate and record formative assessments of the children's skills in order to make the pupil profile more reliable and valid

Future Plans

- To carry out further action-research activities related to peer-assessment and teacher feedback
- To research how I can integrate AfL into all the other areas of the revised curriculum
- To modify my recording system in the light of what I have learned and in anticipation of future information from CCEA on criteria for assessing skills, moderating them, recording them and the pupil profile
- To be involved in the Analysis and Review of Innovative Assessment (ARIA) research project which the Assessment Reform Group will be carrying out in the near future in conjunction with Queen's University
- To generally continue to reflect on ways to develop as a professional

For many years, I have been an advocate of action-research because it is a very effective way both of developing as a professional and as a means of improving the quality of children's learning.

The lasting impact of this PDA is the realisation that action-research and AfL have many similarities. They are in fact reciprocal!

The children learned from me how to improve the quality of their learning and I learned from them how to develop as a professional.

Learning Outcomes & Success Criteria

In class we use learning outcomes and success criteria when we complete some activities. When we are learning something new we all get a chance to tell Mrs Douglas what we think we should have learned.

Mrs Douglas puts these up on the board and asks us how do we know that we have been successful. We tell her our ideas, and then we write them in our books. When we write our success criteria we do something fun called 2 stars & a wish.

This means you give yourself a star for things that you think you were good at from the success criteria. Then you write a wish about something you want to get better at from the success criteria. Mrs Douglas then helps you to achieve your wish by working with you and showing you how to get better.

Today we were doing an activity on the Oxford Infant Atlas. I think I was good at naming deserts and mountains, but for my wish I wanted to get better at finding and naming cities of the world. Mrs Douglas told me to look at a map and I tried to find the cities on the map. I learned where Sydney, Paris, Rome and New Orleans where.

I enjoy this activity because we all work together and we learn about teamwork, and it also teaches you how to get better at understanding more difficult information. It's fun and it lets you know more about the activity and what you should have learned.

Patrick Soaton P₄D

Meet some of my lovely class!



'Two stars and a wish' and 'Traffic Lights' Assessment



