

Assessment for Learning

We are learning to write instructions okay? Effective assessment and appropriate feedback is crucial in helping pupils improve and achieve success, in turn experiencing success builds self-esteem and motivates pupils to make progress. The Revised Northern Ireland Curriculum embraces the principles of assessment for learning as an integral part of the teaching and learning process.

Now, did they give the instructions in the right order? And do you think that they use lots of linking words? Yes...very good. Key features for assessment for learning or effective planning, sharing learning intentions with pupils, discussing and agreeing success criteria what's expected and what success looks like, effective questioning, constructive practical feedback on how work can be improved and encouraging peer and self-assessment and evaluation.

John Wilkinson from Dromore High School describes how he has introduced assessment for learning principles. We developed a whole school approach to assessment. More recently we've more interested in how the young people themselves learn from the assessment process. In order to do that we set up a working party within school after I had looked at the relevant literature present at the time. That working party then analysed the various aspects of formative assessment and summative assessment and we realised that there was a lot more that we could do within the formative area.

As a result of that we began to tease out the various aspects of formative assessment. These aspects including things like peer assessment questioning and one which was close to my heart the setting up of learning intentions some people see this as a very simplistic process but my view was that we needed to look at this over a three to four year period analysing the various aspects of assessment for learning and then embedding it across all of the subjects.

We are going to put that up because obviously that's going to be the most important thing that we create today. By building a more open learning relationship between teacher and learner pupils can be made more aware of the steps needed to achieve their intended learning goals and by sharing and agreeing success criteria they have the information and feedback they need to improve their learning, raising their confidence and self-esteem and reinforcing the belief that they can succeed. I'm going to take that point and put that down as a success criteria and then from that branch out to all the various points that you made.

Ian Thompson of Ballinderry Primary School describes his school experience of assessment for learning. So we started practising writing learning intentions and success criteria and then disseminating that throughout the school. We saw from the start that it would need to be a whole school initiative not something that was done in a couple of staff meetings and that was the end of it and the ball began rolling and we're now at this stage where we have some activities well embedded in the school development plan and in the school itself.

Going to use lots of linking words one of the aspects of this current research was that it was disseminated amongst all the rest of the staff. So we did that with various staff meetings, teachers modelled the different aspects of it. We wrote up the notes in our daily planning and shared those with the rest of the staff. Generally speaking everybody was relatively keen to start this. We tried some of the various activities and the teachers took to them extremely well and we are so keen with this activity we will be starting it in our staff development in the next few months.

When we looked at the research that was being done it was amazing how we could come into the classroom do two or three simple activities with the children and see a big difference in their approach to learning.

For many teachers in Northern Ireland assessment for learning is already part of current good practice. For some a change of emphasis may be needed to explore and make more explicit the elements of assessment for learning that will work for them their pupils and their school.