Self- and Peer-Assessment

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Abstract: This paper is an explanation and clarification of the Self- and Peer-Assessment procedures which have evolved in the Modern Languages Department at Linwood High School. It shows the culmination of months of trials, variations, adaptations and developments until we finally settled on the current model. It is by no means an exhaustive account of the hours of informal discussions we had within and outwith the department and care has been taken to explain why it works in our context.

Background

Having had a year to find my feet as a Principal Teacher of Modern Languages, early in my second year my attention turned to our Self & Peer-Assessment procedures. We had engaged our learners in self-assessment in an informal way through Co-operative Learning techniques by using traffic light cards in their homework diaries and of course by getting them to write statements in their profiles after an assessment. Our Pupil Profiles also contain "I can" statements alongside which pupils can self-assess by ticking the relevant "smiley" box next to each statement. But what I found was that, despite doing these things, our learners did not know what level they were currently working at and what they needed to do to improve. So it was clear to me that we needed to address this. At the time the local authority was also heavily invested in rolling out HOTS (Higher Order Thinking Skills) with the notion of embedding these in lessons and ultimately assessing against them. It was all starting to become the mountain you never seem to reach the top of.

So we started with one small step. In my classroom I had been in the habit of getting the pupils to identify what type of activity they were noting in their jotters by putting an L for Listening, W for Writing, R for Reading, S for Speaking (now T for Talking in line with Curriculum for Excellence Experiences and Outcomes) in a circle before the heading of the exercise. On the back of that I created a monthly Self-Assessment Quick Track (cf. Figure 1). At the end of every month we would take 10 minutes in class to "traffic light" our Significant Aspects of Learning based on how pupils had got on in these activities during the month. I invested in some highlighters in traffic light colours and bought enough to have one set at each co-operative learning group in each classroom. I made A3 laminated display posters for each modern languages classroom with my "How to improve" suggestions that I had had for some time and used to display after assessments on the Interactive Whiteboard. But I found this was not enough.

Figure 1: Sample of initial version of Quick Track Self-Assessment Sheet

This was when I really started putting a lot of research into Self & Peer-Assessment practices. When I saw examples of pupils' work where the pupils had self-assessed their essays using highlighters and writing comments all the ideas starting to come together and the resource boxes were created[1]. The resources I found useful for helping me finalise our own system are all listed on my blog, www.macfloss.wordpress.com. Some of them I abandoned, such as SAMR[2] and SOLO Taxonomy[3] as I found them difficult enough to adapt to our needs and when the learners tried them they found them tedious and unengaging. Some I adapted to suit our needs, such as WWW/EBI (What Went Well/Even Better If) as this was something the learners found they could instantly act on to provide meaningful feedback and it was quick. Some I have fully incorporated into our Self & Peer-Assessment procedures.

I would regularly have discussions with my learners, as did my colleague with his, to gauge their responses of the different systems we were trialling. This was usually informal discussions in class, but we often used exit passes. Pupils unanimously agreed that they liked the peer assessment features and could see the value in the self-assessment for target setting and taking control of their own learning and progress.

One of the things I had insisted upon us doing across the department was getting students to note down date, learning intentions, success criteria and social task[4] at the start of every lesson in their classwork jotters and, in line with 'Assessment is for Learning' approaches[5], we would revisit these with pupils at the end of the lesson and have a brief discussion of how we had got on in meeting those targets, often including Co-operative Learning Group Processing strategies to facilitate this. However, as a Twitter user my attention had been brought to the work of Dr Debra Kidd by

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[1] #PedagooFriday https://twitter.com/misscs_teach/status/662565555170320384

[2] Musingsfromtheisland (2014) [blogpost] SAMR Is It All It's Cracked Up To Be? and Classroomsnextlevel (2015) [blogpost] Cup of Blooming SAMR

[3] UKEdChat (2014b) A pragmatic approach to SOLO by @ScienceDouglas and SOLO Taxonomy for Self/Peer Assessment http://ukedchat.com/resources/wsr00013/

[4] The Social Task is an essential feature of the 5 Basic Elements of Co-operative Learning.

[5] http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/learningandteaching/assessment/

@TeacherToolkit (Ross Morrison McGill) and her claim that over 32 hours are 'lost' in writing down learning objectives. So were we wasting our time doing this?

Figure 2: Tweet from @TeacherToolkit

Discussing it with colleagues at our Departmental Meeting I was reassured that we were not because our Learning Intentions and Success Criteria form an integral part of our robust Self & Peer-Assessment strategies. Copying down learning intentions and success criteria is not a stand-alone activity but just one tooth of the cog of our Self & Peer-Assessment system.

Procedures

The contents of the resource boxes (cf. Figure 3) are:

- 2 sets of highlighters – red/yellow/green – referred to as "traffic lighters"
- 1 fan with definitions and descriptions of each level of the Higher Order Thinking Skills
- 2 "How do I improve" cards
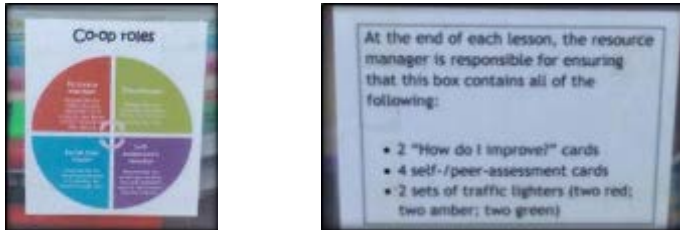- 4 double-sided Self & Peer Assessment cards

Figure 3: Resource boxes for self and peer-assessment

We use Co-Operative Learning strategies in our department and we have weekly roles and responsibilities for each group member. One of those roles is "Resource Manager" and it is their job to retrieve the Resource box for their group at the start of each lesson and any other resources listed in the "Resources Needed" box on the lesson starter page of our Interactive Whiteboard flipcharts, which will always be displayed for the class upon entering the room. It is also their responsibility to ensure everything is in the box at the end of the lesson before returning it to its storage space in the classroom. This works well as the Resource Manager knows they are accountable for anything that goes

missing and to date, nothing has, despite this being an initial concern. On the boxes there is a reminder of the Co-op group roles and of the contents of the box (cf. Figure 4)

Figure 4: Reminders

As previously mentioned, we ask all our learners to copy the date, Learning Intentions, Success Criteria and Social Task each lesson and we discuss these and HOTS with our learners, often linking directly with the Experiences and Outcomes from Modern Languages (MLAN) and occasionally also numeracy (MNU), Literacy (LIT) and other interdisciplinary learning opportunities. We have a standardised page on our Interactive Whiteboard (IWB) flipcharts to do this and they look as shown in Figure 5. When we do include one of the Es & Os we take the time to link the language contained in them with the HOTS headings and have a discussion, using the support of the HOTS fans, to elicit which skills we will be covering during the lesson.

Figure 5: Standardised Presentation of Learning Intentions, Success Criteria and Social Task

When we have completed an exercise and marked in class, the Self-Assessment monitor of each group is then reminded to encourage their group to self-assess using the traffic-lighters and, if a comment is needed, the "How to self-assess" cards. Pupils then use the traffic-lighters to colour-code the L/R/W/T in the circle at the start of the activity heading. Additionally, we regularly revisit the Learning Intentions and Success Criteria and we self-assess against them using our traffic lighters. Pupils simply highlight the bullet point in the appropriate colour. If it is red, they should then use the Self-Assessment card in the box to leave a WWW/EBI comment under the exercise to alert the class teacher as to what the particular difficulty was. Similarly, after peer-assessing an exercise completed in class, learners will use the "How to peer-assess" cards to leave constructive feedback and will sign the jotters/work "PA by _____" (cf. Figure 6).

Figure 6: How-to instructions

Following these procedures on a lesson-by-lesson basis was initially time-consuming, but once we had the system fine-tuned and up and running, it simply became a matter of course and pupils became used to the routines. Now, when it comes to completing the monthly Quick Track, it is easy for them to quickly scan through the month's work in their jotter and decide how they are currently working, then fill out the sections of the Quick Track, which they stick in the inside back cover of their jotters, using the "How do I improve?" cards in the resource boxes for help (cf. Figure 7).

Figure 7: Starter Phrases for Self- and Peer-Assessment

The class teacher then collects the jotters, reads the comments on How to Improve, writes in what level the learner is currently working at and signs off with either VF (Verbal Feedback) or WF (Written Feedback) given. We also have discussions with the learners in class as to what Verbal Feedback might look and sound like, so they know and understand that it has happened. Learners then take their jotters home to be signed by a parent or carer so that we know they are sharing and discussing their progress in ML at home. This area still needs work, but we have it incorporated with our ClassDojo[6] Promoting Positive Behaviour system, so hopefully that will improve in the future.

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[6] ClassDojo is a free online and app based programme designed to promote positive behaviour and engagement in classrooms.

Results

Our aim in creating and embedding this system was to allow learners to take more ownership and awareness of their own learning journey in Modern Languages by regularly self-assessing. We wanted our learners to know and understand not only what level they were currently working at, but how they had achieved that and what they needed to do to progress to the next level. Feedback from our pupils has been positive overall. They find it quick and easy to use, it helps them to set targets for themselves and it has helped them to focus on what is positive about their work. They are also able to give their peers positive and constructive feedback, all of which are transferrable skills. The parent/carer signature they have not yet engaged with and when things get busy, it tends to be forgotten. In the main, however, they do see the value in it.

Next Steps

Like all reflective practitioners, I am always striving to improve the learning experience in my classroom. I am not quite happy with the Quick Track and am trying to find a way of engaging parents more in signing it. I thought about combining the Quick Tracks for year groups S1, 2 and 3 into a booklet to cover the whole of the Broad General Education at Secondary school level (S1 – 3), but decided against it when I thought it would just be another piece of paper to get lost. I considered creating an electronic version our learners could access from their user accounts on the school network, but then how do you get the parents to sign off on it? So we will continue as is for the time being. I mentioned earlier about using ClassDojo to try and engage parents more with the sign-off. This year I will trial using ClassDojo ClassStory, which is similar to an Instagram wall where you can post photos and text, and connected parents can view and "like" the posts (but not comment on them), to send screenshots of the Quick Track to all subscribed parents for each class to try and boost the signing that way. I will offer a specific "Quick Track Signed" dojo point for those who get it done quickly as an extra incentive.

Summary

It took us a while to transform the original thought into a working procedure that would not be too cumbersome and I envisage I will continue to tinker with it in the future, to make it even better. The HOTS fans were a lot of work to create and were the last to go in the box – with a little added oomph from an impending HMIE Inspection to spur us on. What I must say is that I was in the fortunate position of having a fantastic team who shared my vision, worked with me to get this system up and running and then helped to tweak it to make it even more streamlined and manageable. My thanks in particular go to @SenorDuffyMFL for assembling the boxes and creating the essential instruction labels for the sides and for supporting me throughout a busy but rewarding year.

References

As an avid Twitter user most of my background reading and research was conducted online. My primary source of information was UKEdChat Magazine where the articles are written by teachers for teachers. They often detail the trials and successes of various attempts to address issues. Here is a list from this site of articles I read which informed the development of our system.

UKEdChat (2011) Session 29: Closing the Gap: Why is the achievement gap between rich and poor children so wide?

UKEdChat (2011) Session 34: How can pupils give each other quality feedback and enhance their learning?

UKEdChat (2012) Session 117: Feedback: how can we make marking make an impact?

UKEdChat (2013a) Session 137: How to reduce to the mark-load & still give quality, valued feedback? Ebacc/GCSE announcement from Michael Gove:

UKEdChat (2013b) Session 140: How to reduce the mark-load and still give quality, valued feedback?

UKEdChat (2013c) Session 151: How LOs, WALTs, WILFs, success criteria etc are used to aid learning?

UKEdChat (2013d) Session 169: Effective feedback – How do you make your marking count?

UKEdChat (2014a) Using DIRT as a Learning Journey

UKEdChat (2014b) A pragmatic approach to SOLO by @ScienceDouglas

UKEdChat (2015) Session 270: Feedback – to give is better than to receive

Other Notable Blogs

Musingsfromtheisland (2014) [blogpost] SAMR Is It All It's Cracked Up To Be?

Classroomsnextlevel (2015) [blogpost] Cup of Blooming SAMR

BGoodMan (2015) [blogpost] The Problems with Peer and Self-Assessment

Resources

Self-Assessment stickers: http://ukedchat.com/resources/wsr00018/

Solo Taxonomy for Self/Peer Assessment http://ukedchat.com/resources/wsr00013/

UKEdChat (2015) Directed Improvement and Reflection Time (DIRT) Sheets by @MrsHumanities

#PedagooFriday https://twitter.com/misscs_teach/status/662565555170320384

Appendix: Acronyms

Es and Os   Experiences and Outcomes: describe the expectations for learning and progression in all subject areas of Curriculum for Excellence, Scotland's current curriculum policy. http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/myexperiencesandoutcomes/gettingstarted/introduction.asp

HMIE   Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education

ML   Modern Languages

MLAN   Reference code for modern languages in Experiences and Outcomes document. http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/myexperiencesandoutcomes/languages/modernlanguages/alloutcomes.asp

MNU   Reference code for (mathematics and) numeracy used in Experiences and Outcomes document. http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/myexperiencesandoutcomes/responsibilityofall/numeracy/alloutcomes.asp

LIT   Reference code for literacy in Experiences and Outcomes document.

             http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/myexperiencesandoutcomes/responsibilityofall/literacy/alloutcomes.asp

IWB   Interactive Whiteboard