

A problem shared



Develop a culture of peer assessment and children will achieve far more together than they would alone, says **David Dunn...**

So far we've dealt with AfL through differentiation, questioning and marking. Now we move onto the last piece of this series and, arguably, one of the most difficult to get right – peer assessment. So, how do we get it right? Well, let's clear a few misconceptions up first. Peer assessment is much, much more than children just marking each other's work. A couple of ticks and a smiley face really don't cut the mustard! If it's going to be effective it must be done in a way that helps children to engage with and reflect upon each other's work, and consider how the work can be improved.

Through their work *Inside the Black Box* and *Working inside the Black Box*, Professors Paul Black, Dylan William and others at King's College London are very clear that both peer and self assessment are valuable in promoting learning, but they believe that skills in peer assessment should be developed first. Peer assessment enables children to give each other valuable feedback so they learn from and support each other. It adds so much more to learning and the opportunity to talk, discuss, explain and challenge enables children to often achieve more than they would unaided.

So, how is it best introduced? Obviously, you don't want comments along the lines of: "You mean that you want me to mark his work so you don't have to do it?" Or "She's not looking at my work – she'll copy it!" Therefore, it is important that children



are introduced to the concept of peer assessment carefully, as well as being given the tools to carry it out effectively. Try these two ground rules to get them started:

1 Establish from the beginning that the purpose of peer assessment is to help children to have an understanding of assessment and what constitutes progress and success. This will eventually lead them onto planning their own work to meet their own individual targets.

2 Create a supportive, non-threatening environment where it is safe to share thoughts without the worry that any demoralising, destructive comments will be allowed. It's important that children feel secure in this or you won't reap the maximum benefits.

Peer assessment will not be effective until you have discussed, shared and developed the correct use of learning objectives and success criteria. Children need to know what they are looking for before they can identify it. It may well be best, as you begin this, to use anonymous work from another class or, even better, a previous year. Keep the focus tight, ensuring that you don't ask the children to try to look at too much at once. The benefits of an anonymous approach are that the children learn all the skills necessary to make peer assessment work successfully, without the stress that can come with trying to assess the work of other children from their class.

There are many ways of using peer assessment and the following ideas are just a few of the strategies I find work well in the classroom.

Three stars and a wish

Asking children to make judgements on others'

work can be a little daunting for all involved. By using this technique you focus more on the positive. In a nutshell, the children give three things they think their partner has done well with (the stars), and one suggestion for improvement (the wish). Remember to keep those focuses specific!

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The feedback sandwich

Here is one way to provide a feedback 'sandwich':

- positive comment
- constructive criticism with an explanation of how to improve
- positive comment

And here's a similar, but slightly different, way: contextual statement: 'I liked . . . because . . .'

- 'Now/next time . . .'
- interactive statement (question):
- 'Why did you use . . .'

The first way is suitable for both KS1 and KS2, the second more for KS2.

Plenary buddies

This technique requires you to choose a pair (or small group) of children to take responsibility for the plenary at the end of your lesson. You will

need to give them a few minutes before the plenary in order to get their thoughts together. If they feel confident enough, they can discuss their work with the class and check it against the learning objective and success criteria. You could use a visualizer (if you have one; it's a type of camera that projects work straight from the book onto your interactive whiteboard), or have a piece of their work photocopied and handed round, or photocopied onto an overhead transparency and projected. Ensure children relate their learning back to the learning objective and success criteria.

What do I know?

If you're feeling confident, this activity works very well; the children love it and it promotes healthy discussion. Give children the opportunity to assess your work or understanding of the concept being taught. Talk your way through your learning as if you were one of the children. Remember to make mistakes; the children will pick up on these and provide you with a good assessment opportunity – children can both recognise that what you are doing or saying is wrong, and tell you how to improve or put right those mistakes.

Chat it!

Ask children to mark each other's work by putting a cross next to any errors, but without identifying what is wrong. The answers then have to be corrected whilst in dialogue with their partner.

As you can see, there are many ways of enabling the children to become effective peer assessors. And it is well worth persevering with peer assessment as the benefits to the learning in your classroom can be huge.

The language of peer assessment

IT'S NOT JUST WHAT YOU SAY BUT THE WAY THAT YOU SAY IT...

Give the children - through posters on the wall, if necessary - the correct language to use when peer assessing. Some examples of this include:

- ✓ 'I like this part, but have you thought of...'
- ✓ 'What made you use this word/phrase/connective/simile/metaphor and not another one?'
- ✓ 'The best part is when you...'
- ✓ 'I think that next time you ought to think about...'
- ✓ 'I think you've achieved these two success criteria, but I'm not sure about the third. What do you think?'

And so on. Obviously, the kind of language used will be dependent on the age of the children.

