

The Leadership Series: Assessment for Learning Thursday 26th November 2009

Executive Summary

Keynote 1: Keith Harris: Assessment for Learning (AfL)

The most important job in the world is teaching.

The most important issue within teaching is Assessment for Learning...

... so this is a very important morning!

“With great power comes great responsibility” – Spiderman

Entitlement, equity and excellence - Charles Desforges diagrams - we must do more than just raise standards for all

- We need to decrease the tail end of the graph – raise the standard of the seriously underachieving
- We must extend the reach of the graph – every child should have the opportunity to reach excellence in their areas of talent, not just the most academically able

AfL principles hold in all teaching and learning situations; everyday they are useful and always important, providing personalised learning in all situations

The learner must always be at the centre of learning

- Children must understand what it is they are trying to learn
- Being a successful learner does not mean you will have successful learning all the time – must persevere
 - Connect pieces of learning
 - Put learning in context with longer term goals – boys in particular want to know why they are learning something
- Children want to see the quality of their work and how they can improve it – feedback on quality and progress provides a motivation to improve

➤ *Discuss within your school what people think makes a good learner*

Dialogue – talk for learning

- If children are not talking, they are not learning
- Dialogue should be focussed, structured and supported
- Too much talking at children without interaction will not enable learning
- To teach you need to facilitate discussion, move the discussion around the room from one learner to another, ‘basketball’ discussion, rather than question and answer ‘ping pong’ discussions
- Mix up the format of discussion – class, pairs etc.

➤ *Try ‘basketball’ discussions in your classroom and have learners work in pairs*

AfL is about developing autonomous/ independent learners

What do teachers need to do to develop this kind of learner?

- Teachers need a good understanding of progression and what it is they want the children to learn – it is important teachers are comfortable with what they know
- Use peer assessment as a tool – get the class to work with a friend to support their learning

BUT – you must do more than just go through the motions...

- If you just tell pupils to make three good comments and one area for improvement on each others work they will complete the task and switch off
- Teachers must continually interact, walk around, everything a teacher does needs to be about helping the children to learn – never sit back

What do teachers need to do outside of their lessons that make them good in their lessons?

- Everyone in school should take responsibility for their own learning (this includes teachers)
- Teachers should apply AfL principles to themselves
- Planning, professional knowledge, learning how to work collaboratively with colleagues, establishing relationships with pupils outside of lessons

➤ *Consider what help teachers need from schools to make it possible for them to do what they need to do to teach well*

The coaching handout tool - use it to develop a shared understanding of AfL in your school.

Evaluate the impact AfL is having – needs to be systematic evaluation of when AfL is working

- Evaluating progress is a very important skill
- Use the document with your senior leadership team – colour code it
- Don't get stuck in the development stage – start establishing practices
- The shift from development to establishment is where the groundbreaking changes happen

Professional development is an ongoing process not a series of independent events.

School improvement is about getting better at how you are getting better, not just about getting better!

Keynote 2: Gillian Mills: A Case Study: Cross in Hand CE Primary School

Gillian started her teaching career in a very challenging school and learned fast that to be successful it was crucial to engage the children.

- Understand their level
- Make them see why they need to learn what you are trying to teach

She took over as Headteacher at Cross in Hand CE Primary School when it was a failing school. The Local Authority opened a new school one mile from Cross in Hand, causing a third of pupils to move and leaving behind a group of disillusioned parents. One year later she managed to talk Ofsted out of putting the school on special measures and began turning the school around.

What is important?

- Need to narrow the gap between what we teach and what the children learn.
- Use the school council – the children! Get them to give feedback.
- Be strict with uniform – parents take pride in having well turned out children. The children feel part of a successful school team.
- No one works alone, including the headteacher – the job is too complex to be done by one person – join together several minds and you will do much better
- Whole school policies mean everyone works in a similar way so the pupils get continuity
- Be a role model for the children (do not shout across the auditorium on a school trip to the theatre if you do not want the children to do the same!)
- Life skills are as important as literacy – children need to learn how to talk to an old lady and how to knock on the headteachers door to admit they are responsible for a mistake. Use the playground as well as the classroom for learning

- Never use language such as “this child can’t...” – intelligence is not fixed, every child should have the opportunity to be the best they can be
- Challenge children to challenge their own personal best
- *Always ask the question “what if?”*
- If we do this what will the impact be on the children?
- When we’re good at this, what will the impact be?

“If you want to be successful here you have to do the best you possibly can do for our children.”

Language of Learning

- *Use any opportunity to get specific learning language in to school*
- Awards assembly – be really specific about what the award is for and include in the award title learning terminology
- *Tell pupils what we want them to learn in the questions we give them – make sure they know what good looks like and where they are trying to get to.*

Support for Learning

- Support needs to stay still so children know where to find it
- Support needs to be where children can see when they are trying to learn
- Support needs to be up-to-date, support for old learning issues just clutters the space
- Children need to know how to use learning supports

Excellence models

- Display good work alongside descriptions of why the work is good.
- Over the Summer do not strip the school walls – use the previous class’ work as an example to the next so they know where they are aiming to go in the coming year
- Encourage the same standard of work at home as at school – homework should not produce second rate learning

Reinforcing messages

- Use photos to engage learners
- Signpost children on how to improve their learning
- Subliminal messages – excellent work left on library wall tells the next team looking after the library that they have a tough act to follow!
- Photos of successfully throwing and catching a ball shows how to be good at it, what the children are aiming for

Set targets

- Change targets regularly and make sure they are individual
- Celebrate progress, get children to monitor their own progress using an exciting wall chart

Questioning (One of the hardest things we did!)

- How can the way we question our children help their learning?
- Make children more independent in their learning
- Do not give direct answers, make children think and search for their own answers
- *Question your learners to get them thinking and finding the answers themselves*

Changing the pedagogy to allow more focussed teaching

- Small group learning with greater attention from the teacher is extremely beneficial to learning
- Must occupy the rest of the class with a sufficiently open ended task that they can take their own learning forward without direct attention from the teacher

Self assessment and focussed marking

- Marking should be continuous not just based on a one-off piece – refer back to previous comments so the pupil can monitor their progress
- Get pupils and their peers to assess their own and each other's work – teacher comments should refer to pupil comments
- Peer feedback is often more powerful and meaningful to the pupil than teacher feedback
- Give pupils time to reflect on their learning – this should be part of the school day

Assessing pupil progress

- Use children to help assess
- Be explicit about the next steps for individuals
- Think about how to increase the staff skills base as this will impact on the children

Impact – feedback from pupils, teachers and parents is important to see how everyone is gaining

- **Pupils** are explicit about their learning and what they gain
- **Teachers** feel motivated as they can see the impact their techniques are having on the children's learning so they are gaining
- **Parents** appreciate the progress their children are making

Keynote 3: Professor Mary James: Assessment for Learning: the next ten years?

“Assessment for Learning is the process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners and their teachers to decide where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go and how best to get there”. – Assessment Reform Group (2002)

- *Make learning intentions part of the conversation of the classroom not just written on the board.*

The notion of getting children to think is crucial – do not immediately answer them but give them appropriate thinking time.

Politicians and the press are slow to understand AfL but it is up to schools to make the changes and policy will follow.

Whilst E-assessment can be useful we do need to be sceptical as well – e.g. children in the US have learnt how to write in a formula that scores well when read by a computer but makes no sense to a human being – there is high performance but no learning.

There is no such thing as formative and summative assessment – these are terms that can only be applied retrospectively as they describe how the information is used. A ‘summative assessment’ can still be used formatively if it is deconstructed.

While teachers need frameworks to assess students' progress these should not be stepwise ladders but rather measure proximal development.

- Development can be in any number of directions and depths – zonal development.

Children need examples of what quality looks like – these should be beyond their current achievement but not out of reach.

AfL needs to be integral part of pedagogy and everyday teaching.

Professionals need to spread practice and then the policy makers will pick up on it and support.

The challenges for leadership – creating the conditions for effective AfL

- Focus on learning rather than performance
- Enter into the spirit of AfL rather than follow the letter
- Resist just 'ticking-the-boxes', Challenge Ofsted!
- Make space for thinking – reduce time pressures
- Prioritise the cultivation of AfL literacy within your school, the profession and the public
- Develop policy and practice based on evidence

“Learn from yesterday, live for today, hope for tomorrow. The important thing is not to stop questioning”. – Albert Einstein