CASE STUDY REPORT

Enabling pupils to become more active learners through Assessment for Learning (AfL)

Marilyn Trigg

This study was originally published in 2009 as part of the 'What Works Well' initiative, part of the National Strategies for Education in England.

Abstract

Background: The purpose of the study was to improve writing standards, increase independence and responsibility for learning, and empower children in their learning through the use of AfL strategies.

Aims: The main aim of the development work was to improve motivation and attitudes, empower children in their learning, and reduce underachievement through appropriate AfL strategies.

Methods: Participants include pupils, senior leadership team, teachers, local authority staff, and primary network advisers. They are all involved in the two-year AfL program to improve writing, motivation, attitudes, and independence in learning. Methods used included training by advisers and specialists, trialing of strategies, discussion, observation, teacher assessment, pupil consultation, and staff questionnaires.

Findings: The main findings of this case study are that AfL strategies have had a positive impact on pupil learning, teaching, and school organization and leadership. It has resulted in improved motivation and attitudes, increased involvement in learning, and improved collaboration between teachers and schools.

Implications: The findings suggest that AfL strategies can have a positive impact on pupil learning, teaching, and school organization and leadership. It can lead to improved motivation and attitudes, increased involvement in learning, and improved collaboration between teachers and schools.

This abstract was generated by Camtree using a large language model (LLM) and added to the original report in 2023.

Keywords: Primary education; English - writing

Introduction

What were your reasons for doing this type of development work?

Concern was expressed, throughout the Partnership, about the stagnation of results in writing, the level of independence exhibited by the children, the lack of responsibility for their own learning and the need to raise standards in Learning and Teaching.

(Partnership of 14 schools: 11 primary, 1 special, 2 secondary)

Who might find this case study useful?

- Pupil
- Senior leadership team (SLT)
- Teacher

Description

What specific curriculum area, subject or aspect did you intend to have impact on?

- English - writing

How did you intend to impact on pupil learning?

For children to become actively involved in their own learning and for children to be involved in classroom assessment practices. Children understanding how to improve their own work.

What were your success criteria?

- Improved motivation and attitudes (measured through pupil questionnaire and observations)
- Teachers' use of AfL strategies (measured through observations and scrutiny of books)
- Use of marking ladders
- Fewer incidents of dis-affection through appropriate work
- Children's control of their own learning (measured through lesson observations)
- Improvement of children's confidence through knowledge of their own learning and next steps (measured through interviews, raised children achievement)
- Reduced underachievement through appropriate AfL strategies
- The empowerment of children in their learning

Baseline:

 Lead AfL teachers cascading knowledge. Inconsistency of practice between schools. Inconsistency of transition. AfL not embedded in classroom practice. Inconsistency of delivery of AfL.

Data Baseline:

SATS/GCSE analysis of individual schools to give quantifiable measures then average baselines across most of the schools. Measurement in the nursery would then average baselines across most of the schools. Measurement in the nursery would be the impact on the improved learning in the scores at the end of Year 1 in the future. Improvements in adult learning will be the extent to which the training given to stakeholders impacts on the children's homework, children's class work and through outside support. Data baseline would be the value added data throughout the individual schools thereby giving data in order to assess gains in learning. The Partnership are hoping to empower adults to become more actively involved in their child's education through more detailed knowledge of the strategies they could use and the partnership initiative.

What information or data did you use to measure progress towards your success criteria?

- Observation outcomes
- Periodic teacher assessment
- Pupil consultation data

Describe the CPD approaches you used

A two year programme was implemented to incorporate AfL training by advisers and local specialists, trialling of strategies and discussion through Lead Teachers in each school. It was introduced at the partnership conference and evaluated at each lead teacher meeting.

What CPD materials, research or expertise have you drawn on?

- The Black and Wiliams Study (Inside the Black Box, 1998)
- Shirley Clarke's Assessment for Learning books.
- Bloom 1984
- Meisels, Atkins-Burnett, Mue, Bicket & Son 2003
- Rodriguez 2004.
- Internal expertise across the Partnership.
- LA advisers (where appropriate).

Who provided you with support?

- Local authority staff

How were you supported?

Through the Primary Network Adviser and Advisers from the LA.

Impact

What has been the overall impact on pupil learning?

- Primary Schools: marked improvement in the grade and level gains in writing over the two-year period. Achievement was above the national achievement. Gains : One grade : 26%, Two grades : 31%, One level : 33%, 1 level + 1 grade : 8%, One level + 2 grades : 0.3%, 2 levels : 1%
- No data available from secondary schools.
- Children are more involved in their learning and more open about their difficulties. Children developing their own success criteria and finding it helpful to further learning. Through questionnaires it was clear that the children liked AfL and found it helped their learning.
- Children enjoyed having a response partner and liked the 'close the gap' comments from the teacher, the success criteria, traffic lights and thinking time. They felt they had more ownership of their learning.
- Students are involved in assessing their own work against GCSE and AS/A level criteria.

Quantitative evidence of impact on pupil learning

- Periodic teacher assessment
- Test results

Qualitative evidence of impact on pupil learning

- Logs or interviews
- Observation outcomes
- Pupil consultation data

Describe the evidence of impact on pupil learning

The Key Stage 2 data in the report (see summary page) takes into account nine primary schools: approximately 330 children.

What has been the impact on teaching?

Teachers report greater focus to their lessons and an improved awareness by the children of what they are learning. Staff now consistently advise children of lesson objectives and are becoming more adept at using various strategies. There is a slow movement away from exhaustive teacher talk to shared learning, with greater opportunity for the children to take control of their own learning. Less able children are developing the confidence to put forward their ideas in a non-threatening environment.

Plus it has led to more focused planning.

Greater focus to teaching with an emphasis from teacher to pupil activity.

Marking and feedback more effective.

Questioning more focused and at a higher level and differentiated.

Teachers now sharing ideas, observing each other teach and discussing more what is happening in their classroom.

Planning now incorporates lesson objectives/success criteria.National Curriculum level descriptors are now translated into student-friendly language (Secondary schools).

Quotes you think are relevant to the impact on teaching

I wouldn't be without AfL in the classroom and I thank the partnership and the Primary Strategy Network for the opportunity for it.

Evidence of impact on teaching

- Evidence from observation and monitoring
- Evidence from planning
- Teacher perceptions

Describe the evidence of impact on teaching

Staff questionnaires and lesson observation demonstrated a range of ways in which teachers had improved their teaching through AfL strategies (see report, Summary page).

What has been the impact on school organisation and leadership?

More training for Teaching Assistants and Governors. More collaborative and shared working within schools and within the Partnership.

Evidence of impact on school organisation and leadership

Improved collaboration between teachers and schools.

Summary

What is the crucial thing that made the difference?

- Learning: commitment of all staff to the project. Agenda item each week on the staff meeting agenda for discussion of good practice. Time given for training and feedback. Teachers visiting each other looking at good practice.
- Teaching: good training. Time given for experimentation in the classroom then reflection on what happened. Regular time for teachers to get together to discuss good practice and any problems.
- Leadership: Clear leadership. Good organisation and management of the project. Clear time limits and firm and clear action plan. Leadership had good knowledge and understanding of the skills required.

What key resources would people who want to learn from your experience need access to?

- Research documentation (see report below)
- Shirley Clarke Assessment for Learning books
- Trained teaching assistants
- Scheduled training for all members of staff
- LA adviser support, when required

If another individual or school was attempting to replicate this work, where would they start and what would the essential elements be?

- Start with a whole school/partnership launch meeting with lead speaker on Assessment for Learning.
- Essential elements: It has to be a long term commitment with a detailed but flexible action plan. Evaluation has to be focused on the success criteria. Budget considerations have to be incorporated into the action plan. The project needs to include all stakeholders of the school.

What further developments are you planning to do (or would you like to see others do)?

- The development of the Digitalbrain Learning Platform in order that all schools can use it effectively to create independent learners.
- Ensure awareness and consistency in the use of marking strategies and symbols by teaching assistants and all new staff.
- Compile an Assessment for Learning information pack for new staff.
- Continue to include AfL on all plans to show where it is being used and to act as a reminder.
- Consider reviews of the Teaching and Learning and Assessment policies.
- Introduce cross-phase partnerships between staff.
- Conduct an annual review of Assessment for Learning in each school, supported by observations and work scrutiny.
- Using Assessment for Learning in every subject in the school.
- Making sure it is the subject for discussion at each staff meeting: putting it on the Agenda.
- Children to be more involved in evaluating the impact of AfL.

About Camtree

Camtree: the Cambridge Teacher Research Exchange is a global platform for close-to-practice research in education. Based at Hughes Hall, University of Cambridge, Camtree draws on high-quality research from around the world to support educators to reflect on their practice and carry out inquiries to improve learning in their own classrooms and organisations. You can find out more about Camtree and its digital library at www.camtree.org.

About 'What Works Well'

This case study was originally published as part of the 'What Works Well' section of the National Strategies for Education in England. The National Strategies were professional programmes aiming for improvements in the quality of learning and teaching in schools in England. 'What Works Well' involved teaching practitioners from all phases and areas of education sharing accounts of real developments which had improved learning and teaching, and made a difference to pupil progress. 'What Works Well' case studies were designed to support practice transfer and include sufficient detail and resources to enable others to implement the effective practice described. They were reviewed by experts prior to publication as 'User Generated Content' (UGC) under a licence which encouraged reuse and derivative works, but which precluded commercial use.

Licence