

Embedding formative assessment through a Teacher Learning Community

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To discuss this case study, please contact us via email customersupport@camdenlearning.org.uk



Key Points

- Teacher Learning Community providing sustained joint practice development
 - Focus on Assessment for Learning
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Purpose

What were your reasons for doing this development work?

The [Education Endowment Foundation](#) research suggests that feedback is one of the most effective teaching tools so we wanted to develop our use of formative assessment.

Knowing that we are all creatures of habit and therefore one off INSETs do not contribute to lasting change in classroom practice, we decided to set up a Teacher Learning Community (TLC) in order to ensure that meaningful joint practice development and research could take place.

We set out to improve the quality of our feedback by using our TLC as a vehicle to embed formative assessment.

Who were the identified target learners?

All pupils.

What specific curriculum area did you intend to have impact on?

At first we were focusing on English and mathematics but we soon found that the techniques we were trialling could be easily transferred to all areas of the curriculum.

How were you intending to improve pupil learning?

We intended to improve pupils' learning by making it clear in all lessons where the learner is going with clear advice on how to get there. Our aim was to make pupils owners of their own learning.

What were your success criteria?

- Are lesson objectives clarified, shared and understood?
- Does the teacher engineer effective discussions, tasks and activities that elicit evidence of learning?

- Are students activated as learning resources for one another?
- Are students owners of their own learning?
- Does the teacher provide feedback that moves learners forward?

Methodology

What did you do - what teaching approaches did you use?

We trialled a range of different AfL approaches and strategies during lessons to assess pupils formatively. Each strategy fell into one of the 5 key areas of formative assessment:

- Clarifying, sharing and understanding learning intentions
- Engineering effective discussions, tasks and activities that elicit evidence of learning
- Activating students as learning resources for one another
- Activating students as owners of their own learning
- Providing feedback that moves learners forward

What specific teaching resources did you use?

One of the main resources we utilised was mini-whiteboards. Other resources included exit tickets, post-its, lolly sticks, traffic lights, success criteria, green pens, highlighters- these were all things already available in our classrooms. We also thought very carefully about SMARTs because some of the strategies had to be planned in as key points in the lesson, for example hinge point questions.

When our TLC came to an end we compiled a resource (attached below) detailing all the AfL techniques we found were most helpful. This resource was handed out to all teachers and when new teachers start, we give them a copy to so they can see the level of formative assessment we expect in lessons and to give them some guidance.

What CPD experiences, materials, research and expertise have you drawn on?

I attended a Dylan Wiliam course on Embedding Formative Assessment. Following this we purchased the development pack, held an INSET day in school using the Dylan Wiliam video and materials, and set up a Teacher Learning Community. This was joint practice development, over the course of 2 years.

The TLC comprised 8 class teachers, one cover teacher and myself (Deputy Head). I led the workshops, however, any member of the community could be the leader.

We met once a month for 75 mins (replacing the staff INSET that week) and had 18 workshops altogether. During the workshops we would have some new learning around one area of formative assessment – then each teacher would make a choice about what they would like to try out in the following month. Although we learned as a group, each teacher formed a partnership with a peer to support and challenge one another – this included discussion and peer observations. The pairs were across year groups, so they could all observe learning in another age-group. We already do lesson study, so we are familiar with peer observation. Our Observation framework is attached below. The observations lasted 10-15 minutes, but one of the difficulties was they didn't always get organised every month.

Every workshop session began with feeding back on what we had tried in the last month, continued with new learning and ended with setting a Personal Action Plan (blank attached below). The TLC was an open, supportive environment. Teachers were very honest and non-judgemental, we had a common language; it was a real teacher learning community. Some weeks we found we were already doing the 'new' learning, and that was reassuring. During the second year we adapted some sessions that were too secondary-based, to make them appropriate for KS2.

Our workshops came from Embedding formative assessment: a professional development pack for schools – written by **Siobhan Leahy and Dylan Wiliam**. It can be ordered from SSAT [here](#).

[Dylan Wiliam website](#)

Outcomes and Impact

What has been the impact on pupil learning?

Lessons are being carefully planned to ensure that there are lots of opportunities for teachers to assess what pupils are already able to do early on in lessons (eg using a hinge question), ensuring that learners' time is not wasted going over what they already know. Pupils at all levels of attainment are being regularly challenged. During lessons pupils are very clear about what they need to do to be successful and they are heavily involved in evaluating their own and others' efforts which gives them an even better understanding of what they need to do to improve their learning. It is clear that pupils are taking more ownership of their learning.

Evidence of impact on pupil learning

"Pupils are more responsible for learning" (Teacher involved in TLC). One example of this is pupils creating their own success criteria for a learning objective as opposed to teachers giving them a predetermined list to stick in their book which we would have done in the past. Another example is pupils completing exit tickets- showing their teacher what they know,

which feeds directly into planning for the next lesson. In this way lessons are tailored to the pupils' needs. Pupils are much more aware of what is expected of them, how they are performing and what they can do to improve within lessons. This is evident in lessons and books across the school.

What has been the impact on teaching?

Across the school (as evidenced in lesson observations, in pupil work and planning) quality AfL opportunities are being included, and teachers are using AfL to adapt their teaching within lessons and to plan for future learning. One key change we have seen is much more flexibility in lessons. Teachers are adapting the lesson at the time to meet the needs of learners. They are more learner-focused, continually assessing and adapting as they teach. They have taken the most effective techniques and are embedding these in their practice.

One of the things teachers liked about the Teacher Learning Community was "Being able to share new ideas/ techniques to implement into my teaching practice in an informal way."

Evidence of impact on teaching

Lesson observations carried out by external leaders have identified and reported clear evidence of the impact of Assessment for Learning such as, questioning, mini plenaries to clarify, talk partners and mini white boards to rehearse and check learning and understanding. In our previous OFSTED an area identified for development was getting the higher attainers started on work earlier. We are now seeing the use of hinge questions in many lessons- a pivotal point in a lesson which determines who starts work immediately and who remains on the carpet with the teacher for the teaching input. Those pupils who begin work immediately receive their adult input later in the lesson to take them to greater depth.

What has been the impact on school organisation and leadership?

Self and peer assessment and feedback against the success criteria have become common practice. Each teacher is a leader in their own class and are now supporting their Teaching Assistants with giving quality, real time feedback to pupils.

Evidence of impact on school organisation and leadership

There is a shared understanding of the importance of AfL in all lessons. Lesson observations show that teachers, Teaching Assistants and pupils are regularly providing feedback and books show that this is being responded to in an increasingly purposeful manner.

What is the crucial thing that made the difference?

Making this joint practice development a priority in our CPD schedule and enabling teachers

to be part of a TLC once a month for 2 years has meant that teachers took part in classroom enquiry and had sufficient time to change their habits. When teachers work together on a sustained development project like this, they interrogate their practice and analyse strengths, engage with the materials, try things out and return with feedback. They had real ownership of their learning, as we hope our pupils do.

What would your next steps be?

Our next step is to make pupils' responses to feedback even more effective. We will do this by explicitly teaching pupils how to respond to feedback.

Sharing Practice

If another individual or school was attempting to replicate this work, where should they start?

I would highly recommend that a teacher attends the Dylan Wiliam course 'Embedding formative assessment with Teacher Learning Communities' as a starting point- this was what ignited our journey down this path. (See contact details on this [Dylan Wiliam webpage](#)) Also "Embedded Formative Assessment" by Dylan Wiliam is well worth a read.

Once you purchase the resource- the workshops are ready to go!

What would be the essential elements to include?

- An initial INSET- 2/3 hours where the rationale behind the TLC is shared (using Dylan Wiliam video clips to support)
- A Teacher Learning Community, meeting monthly and trying out new strategies feeding back at each meeting, over a long period (2 years).
- Personal Action Plans
- Peer observations and feedback