

Self and peer assessment

By Stuart Kime

During the course of a lesson, or sequence of lessons, you build up a picture of your students learning by using assessments to take multiple inadequate glances through a variety of lenses - moment by moment quizzes, topic questions and so on and by doing so you can increase your confidence in knowing how your students are doing. In a similar way both self-assessment and peer assessment can help your students increase their confidence in how they're doing. And just as you are learning to develop the skills of teacher assessment, so your students need to learn the skills of self and peer assessment. Self and peer assessments are not just valuable tools for producing information. The very act of thinking hard about your own work or someone else's work can be powerful learning events in and of themselves for the person doing the thinking. Done poorly, however, these approaches take up too much classroom time and can lead to students focusing on the wrong drivers of success. Effective self-assessment is a process in which a student thinks independently about their own work and how it could be improved. For it to be useful, the process should be modelled and scaffolded deliberately for your students as it's often unfamiliar and challenging and the steps involved need to be transparent and understood by everyone in your classroom.

There are four things that help most teachers use self-assessment effectively:

1. Firstly, provide students with clear and understandable examples of what you want them to learn - modelling the destination in this way can be incredibly powerful in knowing where they're going on the journey
2. Secondly share specific and understandable success criteria that help your students know how they're doing along the way
3. Plan opportunities for your students to use those success criteria independently to identify both their own successes and the things that they need to improve, and finally,
4. Plan opportunities for your students to work independently to make the identified improvements and I can't stress that last point enough. The most important thing about feedback is what a student does with it

Effective peer assessment involves students thinking about someone else's piece of work and how it could be improved. Peer assessment can be a powerful learning tool and it's not actually about students marking each other's work, as sometimes it's thought, and, structured well, it can have a positive impact both for the student receiving the peer assessment feedback as well as for the student giving it. Often those students who engage in effective peer assessment tasks become much more aware of how to improve their own work by virtue of trying to improve others.

Peer assessment engages your students in taking on the role of what Dylan William has called 'learning resources for their peers' and just as with self-assessment you'll need to provide students with exemplars and success criteria as well as planned opportunities to identify successes and areas for improvement and crucially planned opportunities to act on this information.

Both peer assessment and self-assessment require students to self-regulate effectively. They need to be able to think about the process of their own learning explicitly and to manage it. But to do so requires motivation, a willingness on the part of the student. Your students need to be motivated to engage in something that is inherently difficult so helping them understand not just what they're learning, but also how they learn effectively, can be instrumental in generating the motivation to put in the effort needed to learn.