The 21st Century Learning Alliance

21ST CENTURY LEARNING ALLIANCE

TEACHER FELLOWSHIP

UPDATE REPORT

Eaton Bank School

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Deep Science – AAP and AfL

For the best part of an academic year, Eaton Bank's Science department has been practising APP (Assessing Pupil Progress), and my belief is that the key to how we treat APP lies in the interpretation of the term 'progress'. Do we interpret 'progress' as being the level the student has reached against their target, or do we see it in terms of how to move the student forward? There is a difference, as the former is more summative in its nature, whereas the latter approach seems to me to set this form of assessment apart from the statutory test that it was intended to replace.

To be successful, I believe that APP needs to be closely linked with assessment for learning (AfL). Dylan Wiliam, one of the pioneers of AfL, describes it as the difference between 'a medical and a post-mortem' because so much assessment focuses on what went wrong, rather than what needs to happen to move the student forward (Ref A). APP provides both a level for a particular piece of work and also the guidance on how to progress.

This year we have embedded APP into our year 7 and 8 schemes of work, ensuring that there are opportunities for day-to-day, periodic and transitional assessments. Each assessment task undertaken provides a snapshot of where the student is, with respect to that particular focus and thread within it. When discussing this with the student, we refer to the National Strategies' Assessment grid – a copy of which is in each student's book – covering the current and the target level for the year. The student can thus see what they need to do to move to the next level.

This fits with Professor Wiliam's view (ref B) that we (teacher and student alike) need to know where the student is, where they are going and how they are going to get there. The tools of AfL thus have an integral part to play in the success (or otherwise) of APP. Diagnostic marking, in which the teacher refers to specific features of the current and next level of a thread serves to reinforce the use of the grid to guide the student. QCDA states that AfL strategies involve "learners & their teachers using evidence to decide where students are in their learning, where they are going, and how to take the next steps." (Summarised from Ref C).

Comments in students' books then should (according to Black & William, *Inside the Black Box*) provide:

- feedback to students on the particular quality of their work with advice on how to improve.

For example – when we were analysing the task where students produced a presentation on a man-made material, we used the following guidelines:

Man-made Material Presentation (Staff version)

Homework: you must choose a man-made material, say what it has been used for and why. Use the AF criteria to help you with your presentation and try and meet the highest level you can!

AF means **assessment focus** – the things we are trying to assess in this task!

Thread is the idea that runs through this piece of work.

AF details and level	**What you must do.**	**Marking**
AF2 T4 L3	Give an example of where scientific ideas have been used in developing new materials – such as sharkskin swimsuits; breathable sports shirts.	Student chooses an appropriate example of a man-made material and states simply how science has helped in its development – i.e. sharks move easily through the water, so sharkskin would be good for a swimsuit.
AF2 T4 L4	As above & identify aspects of science used within particular jobs or roles – for example say what the scientist has done in helping develop the material chosen.	As above but student states what the scientist could have done – such as looking at the sharkskin under a microscope.
AF2 T4 L6	Choose a man-made material and describe how aspects of science have been applied in its development.	As above, but student gives more detail on the application of the science to the development of the material.

AF2 – Understanding the applications & implications of science

Thread 4 - Identification of how scientists use science in their work.

Similarly explaining to students what a piece of work will look like, at a particular level, enables them to aim for that level.

Peer assessment helps to reinforce this (Ref D); as students look at each other's work, they will become more familiar with the criteria for each level and will use this to improve their own progress. We are giving students the responsibility for their own learning. Creating autonomous learners will re-position the teacher as someone who will support them to reach their target – and they will (hopefully) see their peers in this way too. Peer assessment thus feeds self-assessment, and the student becomes a reflective learner.

Familiarity with the assessment grid enables teachers to give verbal feedback, for example to a student answering a question, the teacher would reply that the given answer satisfies AFxTy level 4, and to improve could you ….. (and a reference to the next level up). Yes, this will take time, but to paraphrase a common saying 'familiarity breeds content' and the more you use the grid, the easier it is to remember the particular foci, threads and levels. I have seen this in practise!

AF4 T4 is about the assessment of risk, and this is comparatively easy to include in any practical situation – although the challenge here is to ensure that feedback is given to move students to the next level. Obviously, it is not viable to assess every student in every lesson, but it should certainly be possible to do this several times a term.

When setting APP tasks, I now ask students to refer to the assessment grid, so that they are familiar with the criteria for level success. Indeed, some of our classes have developed the ability to suggest where particular pieces of work fit specific assessment foci, as they have become increasingly familiar and thus more comfortable with APP. We have deliberately not re-written the criteria in 'pupil-speak', but have tried to give examples of how the criteria can be met at different levels or why a piece of work does or does not satisfy a level inst

It is still the least able who are least comfortable with APP, but this is not really surprising as many of them are not fully independent learners and are not particularly skilled at reflecting on their achievements. This is our ongoing challenge – to use the tools we have to help all students' progress.

REFERENCES:

Ref A - *Assessment for Learning; Why, What and How*; An inaugural professorial lecture, Dylan Wiliam

Ref B - *Embedding formative assessment with teacher learning communities* – Dylan Wiliam Learning Forum L7 at the North of England Education Conference, January 2010 York UK; www.dylanwiliam.net

Ref C - *AfL with APP: developing collaborative school-based approaches*. Guidance for Senior Leaders; National Strategies

Ref D - *Peer & Self Assessment* Dylan Wiliam, ITScotland.org.uk