Can traffic light self assessment be used effectively in an infant classroom?

Why did you do it?

Upon starting at St Ninian's I familiarised myself with the school improvement plan. The plan detailed that attainment must be improved across the curriculum. One approach to doing this is through the use of effective assessment and feedback.
At the start of the year, I found it difficult to give effective feedback to my infant class. As I am aware of the importance of effective assessment and feedback (Clarke, 2014) I knew this was an area that I needed to improve. In addition, I am aware that to gain full GTCS registration I must be able to effectively assess and enable opportunities for learners to receive valuable feedback (GTCS, 2021.) Partaking in an enquiry around effective assessment and feeedback also enabled me to expand upon and apply learning from the Improving Our Classrooms (IOC) CPD.

Earlier in the year I assumed that my class knew how to effectively self assess using traffic lights. I quickly realised that the children had used this system before but were not secure in it and therefore were not using it effectively. This created a stimulus for my enquiry as Black et al (2004) highlight that children must be aware of how to self assess properly using traffic lights and then be able to discuss their choice. My class were not capable of this and that is why I decided to spend time developing their ability to self assess using traffic lights.

What did you do?

As a starting point I asked my class to self assess their math's learning using a traffic light system to enable me to see how the children did it with no explanation. Figure 1 shows the work of a very able child who claimed he knew how to self assess using traffic lights. Many children in the class had a similar approach. The colour chosen by this child (and many others) did not reflect their true academic knowledge. I then spent 6 weeks building up the classes ability to effectively use a traffic light system based on self assessing against the success criteria. Latterly, I used traffic lighting for peer assessment and next steps for more able learners. I spent time teaching an aspect of assessment/feedback through traffic lights allowing children to practise doing this each day. The next week I would add another aspect to this and allow children to build upon this. I had initially planned to do this with a group of learners but when I realised how effective this could be I decided to spend time implementing it across the class for best results for myself and the learners.

What has happened as a result?

As a result of the implementation, every child in my class can successfully self assess against success criteria using a traffic light colour and explain why they have chosen this. Partaking in the enquiry has prompted me to have an effective traffic light help system. This system was my adaptation of the Dylan Williams (2009) 'cup system.' In my class children have traffic light cards displayed on their desks (figure 2.) This allows me to see who in the class needs immediate help, eventual help, or who is coping with the task. It also allowed me to circulate around the class giving on the spot feedback. As a research informed school, St Ninians advocate for on the spot feedback across the school. This enquiry enabled me to improve my ability to do this. Tissenbaum, M., & Slotta, J. (2019) suggest that giving children on the spot feedback is one of the most effective ways to support children and ensure that they are progressing as they should be.

The use of the traffic light cards also enabled children to make an informed decision about where they think they are at the end of the lesson. Children suggest things like:

"I think I am an amber today because my card was mostly on amber and I needed a bit of help."

"My card was red and I needed lots of help so I put a red dot."

"I can do all the steps in my success criteria so I put a green dot."

My class has a wide variety of abilities and for some children understanding how the system work and being able to allocate a colour against success criteria was my main aim. However, I was able to push more capable learners onto identifying their own next step and peer assess other peoples work. For example, after self assessing themselves against the 2,5,10 multiplication success criteria and realising they were a 'green' I asked children to identify their next steps. Response included

"I could get harder sums and learn more strategies."

" I could multiply numbers by other numbers like 3, 4 or 100."

Children were able to not only say what they have achieved but predict where their learning could go. Having children who are able to do this creates foundations for co-constructing success criteria.

What are the implications?

As a result of this enquiry all children can honestly assess themselves against success criteria with some children being able to peer assess and/or identify next steps.

Initially, I was concerned about having self assessment through the cards on the tables, publicly self assessing and the impact of this on learner identity. However, the cards have contributed to the inclusive classroom and the understanding that children achieve the success criteria at different times/are good at different things.

Success criteria is now truly valued in my classroom as children now look for it to self assesses against. I now think honestly and carefully when creating the success criteria to ensure children will be able to understand and assess against it. Harris et al (2010) highlights that when success criteria is valued and effective self /peer assessment is done regularly, learners become more aware of what they are learning, what helps them to learn and in the long run they become more metacognitive. Through focusing on one area of feedback and assessments (traffic lighting) children have a much better understanding of learning intention, success criteria, peer/self assessment and next steps.

References

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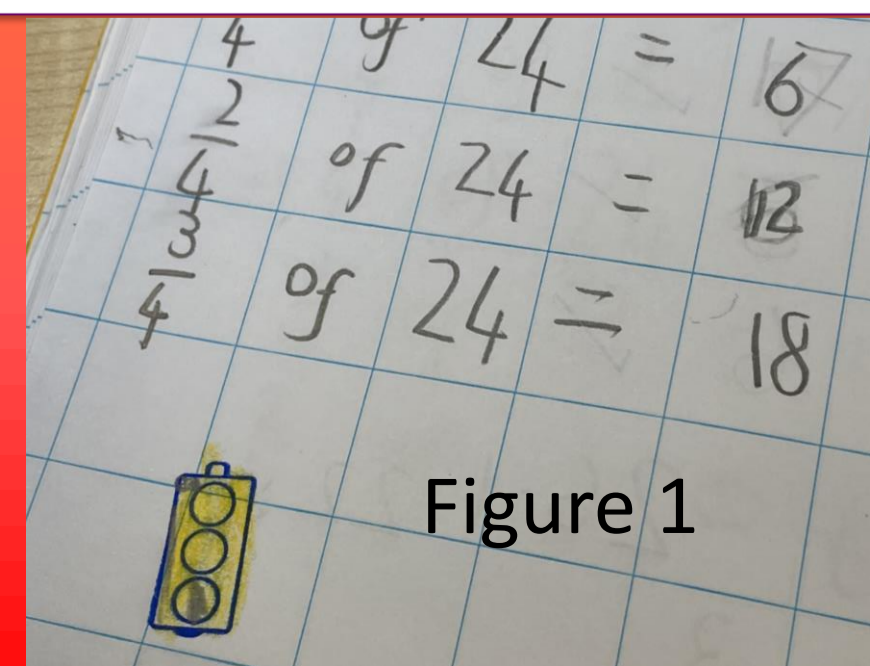Wiliam, D. (2009). *Content then process: Teacher learning communities in the service of formative assessment.* Solution Tree Press.
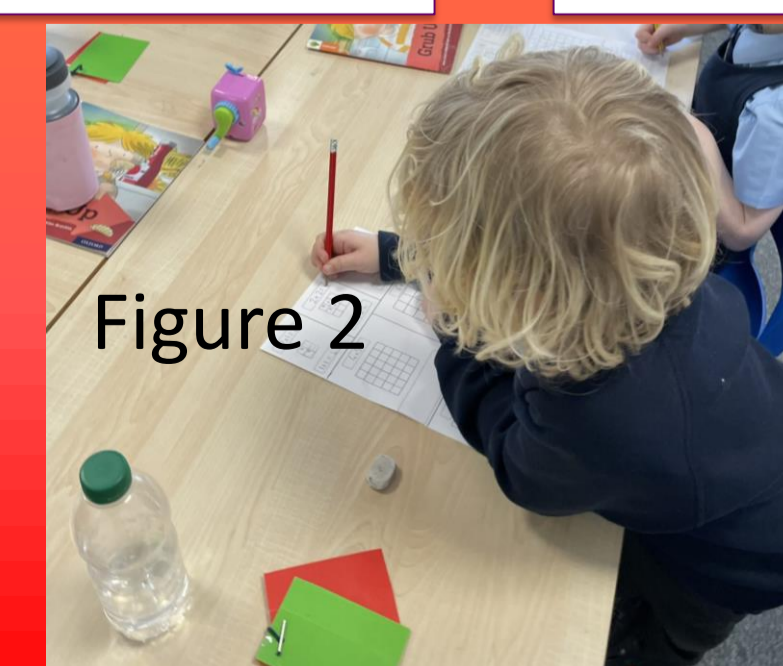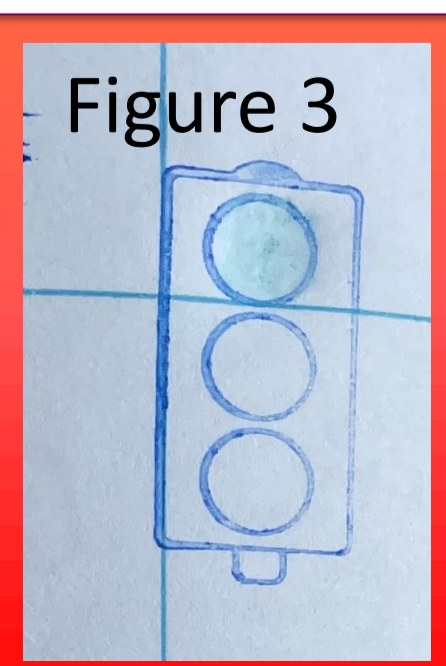
Figure 1

Figure 2

Figure 3