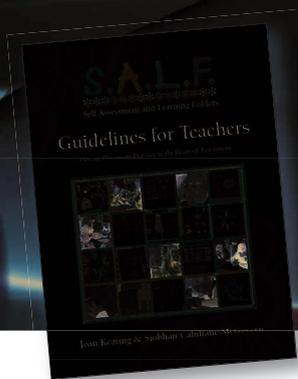


Self Assessment: the importance of knowing me?



Children's voices and classroom practice at the heart of assessment

Assessment is a messaging system about the kinds of learning and achievement that are valued and validated. This is true for everybody involved in the process – directly or indirectly; teachers, children, parents/guardians and the wider school community. That this is so is clearly articulated in a recent Department of Education and Skills (DES) circular to schools (0056/2011). The purpose of this circular was to draw the attention of boards of management, principal teachers and teachers to the publication of *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy Among Children and Young People, 2011-2020*, to list five areas for immediate action under the strategy and to describe how assessment information on pupils' progress should be recorded, used and reported (Section 7).

The circular identifies the importance of assessment, described as 'gathering information about how well students are learning and using this information to improve the learning opportunities provided for them'. Assessment data should be used to provide messages about teaching, learning and achievement to individual students and their parents, to teachers, principals and boards of management and to national bodies such as the DES and the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA). In this article we

propose that schools would benefit greatly from using the SALF approach in order to satisfy two requirements, namely

- 1 Schools should use a balance of Assessment of Learning (AoL) and Assessment for Learning (AfL) practices and
- 2 Schools should report on children's progress to their parents twice during the school year.

The challenges of assessment

In working with teachers as part of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) courses, the authors noted that these aspects of assessment proved challenging and contentious. In particular teachers reported that they found it difficult to manage classroom assessment in a way that ensured children could personalise the process in order to enhance their individual learning and achievements, (AfL). They also noted difficulties with reporting assessment information to parents in a way that demonstrated evidence of children's positive achievements as well as information about what children still needed to improve. Most importantly, teachers wanted to report assessment data to parents in a way that would enable them to support their children in improving and progressing their learning.

The Self Assessment and Learning Folders resource

Self Assessment and Learning Folders (SALF): Primary School Guidelines for Teachers was published in 2011; SALF is

an Irish resource written by Irish authors. The publication was a response to requests from teachers who were attending CPD courses with the authors. During the courses it became clear that teachers wanted a set of guidelines to bring with them after the course in order to demonstrate and explain to colleagues how SALF processes and strategies work. Essentially SALF provides schools and teachers with a structured framework that embodies AfL strategies, encompassing pedagogical methodologies that involve a gradual release of responsibility from teacher to child thus enculturating them into a community of learning and assessment practices. In doing so opportunities are provided for children to individualise their learning and assessment narratives while taking account of classroom learning outcomes, based on curriculum objectives. The guidelines provide models and real life examples of how teachers can model strategies at classroom level, guide and scaffold children as they participate in implementing them and finally children working independently. These strategies include sharing and discussing the learning intentions with children and identifying the success criteria for achieving these using e.g. KWL charts and Rubrics as well as review sheets.

The benefits of SALF

The SALF process works because it takes account of the cognitive, affective and motivational factors that impact chil-

«The SALF process offers opportunities that provide a breadth of information about children's learning and the assessment of that learning, needed by them and their parents in order to support learning and achievement.»»

dren's learning and their assessment of that learning. The cognitive factors are addressed through the following strategies:

- sharing learning intentions;
- using rubrics that are co-constructed with children;
- using task review sheets to consider, discuss and reflect on the degree to which tasks have been achieved.

Affective factors are considered through the use of a designated step in the SALF process that affirms the child as a learner; 'conferring' on each child an encouraging and inspiring word that is true about that child at that time.

Motivational factors are addressed in a number of ways; the first three steps of the process are designated to the child personalising and taking ownership of the folder. A later step in the process involves sharing the SALF folder with different audiences, at home and in school. Choosing what to include in the folder in any particular curriculum area and articulating personal reasons for doing so is highly motivating for children.

Better reporting to parents

DES Circular 0056/2011 states that 'by maintaining regular contact with parents about their children's learning, schools can help them support their children's learning and progress'. However, in a report commissioned by the NCCA and authored by Hall et al (2008), it is noted that reporting is more closely linked with summative than formative assessment. Most reporting to parents relates to the results of tests that have been administered to children, yet this is of least use to parents in terms of providing them with any means by which they can help their chil-

dren to improve. The research conducted by Hall et al. (2008) provides evidence of this. This report also notes that 'regular communication can increase levels of parent involvement, especially among those parents who have less formal education and who need additional structures to engage in schools' (Hall et al. 2008) and enables parents to take part in decisions that have to be made about their children's learning.

Children's participation

A central aspect of the SALF process is that children build and maintain a folder with evidence of their learning and achievements together with justification for their choices. The folders include an organiser that children complete as they insert evidence of learning in each curriculum area. They become aware of the need to include samples of their work across the breadth of curriculum being experienced in school. It also includes space for children to include evidence of their learning outside of the formal school setting. Steps in the SALF process provide opportunities for children to bring the folders home. These opportunities are more than 'show and tell' occasions. Parents are invited to discuss the content, ask questions and provide feedback about it. Advice on ways in which teachers can support parents in this process is provided in the guidelines. Hall et al. (2008) identified the research work of O'Donoghue and Dimmock (2002) as providing a helpful set of reference points for reporting to parents. School reporting should involve parents, students and teachers in assessing, discussing and setting future learning goals. The review sheets, completed by parents as part of the SALF process address this point. Re-

porting should be flexible with regard to when it should occur. SALF folders provide ongoing evidence of learning which can be shared and discussed at any time.

Hall et al. (2008), offered evidence that children wanted more information from assessment data to help them know what to do to improve, more comprehensive reporting about all topics covered at school as well as the social aspects of their learning. This is exactly what parents wanted as well. The SALF process offers opportunities that provide a breadth of information about children's learning and the assessment of that learning, needed by them and their parents in order to support learning and achievement.

Components of SALF

- ❖ SALF: Guidelines for Teachers – Primary School
- ❖ SALF: DVD
- ❖ SALF: Junior Class Folders
- ❖ SALF: 20 Pocket Folders
- ❖ SALF: 40 Pocket Folders including a re-writable DVD
- ❖ SALF: e-Portfolios – 2012

SALF is published in Ireland by Outside the Box Learning Resources (045 409322). More details on www.otb.ie/SALF. See also review of SALF on page 67. 📖

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