Assessment and feedback in an online context: Peer assessment

Evidence Based Education

What's the idea?

Moving from the classroom to online learning presents new challenges, including around assessment and feedback practices. Many of the principles of good feedback and assessment can still apply to the online environment, they just need to be reframed to fit this new context. Regardless of the setting, there are some key considerations around assessments that teachers need to bear in mind.

Peer assessment is not only a good way for pupils to support each others' learning but also helps them to continue to feel part of a classroom community. This compact guide therefore looks at the principles of peer assessment and how they can be applied to online learning.

What does the research say?

Peer assessment does not simply mean that one pupil reviews and marks another pupil's work. It works best as a formative process. As with self assessment, covered in another Compact Guide in this series, pupils need clear worked examples that show them the desired end product and how to get there so they can use this information to assess their partner's work and provide them with feedback. In addition to understanding the success criteria, it is important that pupils learn how to communicate feedback effectively and constructively.

How does this work in practice?

Just as with self assessment, it is important to provide pupils with clear worked examples and success criteria for peer assessment so they know what they should be paying attention to in their partner's answers. Pupils can then review their partner's work against the success criteria and use the worked example to figure out which areas require further improvement. Once pupils have reviewed their partner's work, they need some time to comment on each other's work and provide each other with constructive feedback and detailed suggestions on how their partner could improve.

Before pupils can do so, it is important to provide them with some guidance on how best to formulate such feedback. For example, simply telling their partners that specific answers are right or wrong is not very helpful. It might be a good idea to provide pupils with some examples of the type of feedback they should be aiming for and discuss with them why it is important. Online, pupils could either be grouped together using programmes such as Microsoft Teams, or they could comment on each other's written work using the comment function in Google Docs. Pupils could also verbally record their feedback and share it with their partners.

Top tips

· Allow enough time to prepare the peer assessment activity so pupils know what is expected from them

· Be clear about the purpose and benefit of peer assessment

· Provide pupils with clear worked examples that show the desired end product but also the steps that were involved in achieving it

· Share clear success criteria with pupils

· Explain criteria of good feedback to pupils so they can learn how to formulate helpful comments for their peers

· Provide pupils with enough time to comment on each other's work.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

· Boon S (2020) Using peer assessment as an effective learning strategy in the classroom. Impact 8.
· Christodoulou D (2016) *Making Good Progress? The Future of Assessment for Learning.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.
· Evidence Based Education (2020) Assessment and feedback in an online context. Podcast available online
· Li H, Xiong Y, Vincent-Hunter C et al. (2020) Does peer assessment promote student learning? A meta-analysis. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education* 45(2): 193–211.

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