



Assessment without Levels Conference 15 January 2015 at The Howard School

Tim Oates who was a chair of the Expert Panel for Review of the National Curriculum, states that *it is not about how much or how little assessment we do in our classrooms, but it is the quality and right kind of assessment that matters.*

This idea became the main focus of the Assessment without Levels Conference organised by Medway Teaching School Alliance at The Howard School on 15 January 2015. The conference grew out of the MTSA Assessment without Levels working group, which was established as a result of a meeting for Primary Senior Leaders, who expressed the need for such group, to be set up in March 2014. After several meetings the group began to look at the ethos of assessment and its principles, in order to create adequate assessment systems, for their individual schools' context.



We were privileged to welcome key speakers: Tim Oates, Group Director of Assessment Research and Development from Cambridge Assessment; Chris Chivers, active blogger with 40 years of experience in education as teacher, lecturer and headteacher responsible for strategic leadership and operational management; Mike Sheridan, Senior HMI for the South East region and also three senior leaders from Kent who delivered workshops: Elisabeth Pickles, Director of Curriculum, Highworth Grammar School; Colin Riggs, Assistant Principal, Rye College and Matt Dickenson, Director of Operations and Strategy at Teaching Alliance West Kent and East Sussex.

Tim Oates presented a background, based on wide international research, of the National Curriculum review and why as a result of that review, the levels have been removed. According to the Expert Panel the National Curriculum is pupils' legal entitlement, but the school curriculum should contextualise things, make it big and rich to keep pupils engaged and motivated. The National Curriculum is a list of constructs and the key message from the review is 'fewer things in greater depth.' Effective assessment needs to be linked to Construct, Practice, Exposure and Production which gives an insight into the mind of the learner. It needs to be clear how we assess - things that do not leave a trace of knowledge or behaviour, have not been learnt.

Chris Chivers' presentation: "Talking Assessment or What Do We Tell the Children?" focused on the need to know the children we assess, because if we get the judgement wrong we might go on a wrong journey. Good assessment should be holistic and formative. Teacher judgement needs a frame of reference to assure quality and rapid decision making in lessons, assessment is not just between lessons.



Before the panel discussion took place, Mike Sheridan, a senior HMI and the operation lead for the South East region, outlined Ofsted's approach to making judgements in a world without levels. He drew our attention to the handbook recently published by Ofsted and highlighted how much freedom schools have in the way they can develop their own curriculum and assessment frameworks. He also pointed to the need for moderation, how to show student progress, setting targets and reporting to parents. One key message Mike Sheridan conveyed was to 'Stop, Think, Design and Make It Work.'

All participants had an opportunity to take part in four workshops.

Elisabeth Pickles looked at how we can best use freedom to assess without levels. What are the key principles that should underpin a system of assessment, what are the most effective ways of putting these principles into practice and issues that need to be investigated in relation to assessment?

Chris Chivers in his 'House of Cards' workshop focused on how to develop an assessment framework and to be able to make judgements about process and outcomes.

'One Single Ladder of Attainment' workshop by Colin Riggs created an opportunity to have a brief overview of the journey taken by Rye College; looking at the language of criteria, applying the criteria to student work across phases and the implications.

Matt Dickenson addressed what challenge should look like in the new curriculum. How can we assess our pupil in a way which enriches and extends learning and if removal of levels means just replacing one system with another?

There are several key points for continuous development of assessment which became transparent in the feedback provided by a majority of participants. Collaboration and establishing a common language of assessment between Primary and Secondary schools seem to be the main focus. It would create an opportunity to develop a working party to share understanding of the principles of assessment, allow for moderation and developing a common language based around pupil progress. Many of the participants suggested that practice and any new frameworks

should be based on the principles of the Growth Mindset. There has been also a suggestion that a follow up conference should take place in the future to share what we have achieved and to evaluate and review it, with some input from experts in the field.

Based on the feedback it seems that the conference was very much needed and judged as a success, which should inform future planning and action for the Medway Teaching School Alliance.

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