

A–Z of teaching young learners: Self-assessment

What and why?

In order to learn effectively, we all need to have a clear idea of our strengths and weaknesses. This helps us to know when we need more practice, and when we need to ask for help. Many learners unfortunately never really develop a clear idea of why they get the marks they do at school – it seems that ‘a mark’ comes from some black box that the teacher chooses from at random. It is important, therefore, that we help children to develop an idea of what they have been learning, and how well they think they have done. At these early stages, the emphasis in self-assessment must be on developing the children’s sense of competence. This is an important element in motivation.

Practical ideas

- The Revision sections in the Activity Book include an ‘I can...’ section. This is intended to show the children what they have learned – that is, what they can do. It is important to create a sense of achievement in this. After asking for examples of things they can say, everybody should colour in the star, regardless of how well you think they really know it. A sense of success is vitally important early on.
- If children are not doing very well, rather than giving them a sense of failure, ask them how they think they can improve. (This can realistically only be done in the mother tongue.) Discuss with them what they find difficult, and make suggestions of things that you and they can do to help them improve.
- Positive self-esteem in learning is an important element in continued success. At the end of each week or month, you could ask the children what they think they have learned. You could make a poster of Things we can say in English to put on the wall.
- Some children start to lose self-confidence very early in their school life, and it can take years to restore it. Teachers need to be sensitive to the children’s view of themselves, and to give encouragement and support if they are developing a poor image of themselves as learners. Praise effort as well as actual achievement.