

Table 3.1 Information for Parents

## PEER ASSESSMENT: A BRIEF GUIDE

Part of life at school asks children to try to do better than other children. But another very important part of school and later life is working with and helping other people. Children learn well in both ways.

### What is Peer Assessment?

Peer assessment means having children try to help other children to learn by appraising or assessing their work – then encouraging each other to think about and discuss what makes a good piece of work. After this discussion the piece of work is likely to be revised before it is submitted for final assessment.

Both the child who is assessed and the child who is the assessor are likely to be helped by this process. It is important that peer assessment is set up in a way that makes sure that this happens. So helpers are not just being “used.” To be able to help you have to really get to understand the subject well and be able to explain it. So helping helps the helpers learn faster, too.

Sometimes older children help younger children, and sometimes more able children help less able children of the same age. Usually however, peer assessment operates between children of the same age and ability, and it is reciprocal – that is, each partner takes turns to assess the other partner.

Peer assessment is used for only a small part of the school day. It increases the effectiveness of regular teaching directly by the class teacher, which still forms by far the biggest part of schooling.

The idea is a very old one, first noted hundreds of years ago. Teachers in many different kinds of schools have found that peer assessment is a great “boost” for all children. Today, peer assessment is spreading rapidly in many parts of the world.

### Does It Work?

Peer assessment has been used with a very wide range of subjects, including mathematics, spelling, writing, languages, science, thinking skills, and computer skills. There is a lot of research over many years proving that peer assessment works. The helpers improve in the subject area as much, if not more than, the students who are helped, but at their own level. Research shows that peer assessment also improves how both helper and helped feel about the subject area – they get to like it more. Also, in many cases the helper and helped grow to like each other more, and get on better. There are also many reports of both helper and helped showing more confidence. The research clearly shows that peer assessment is a highly effective way of using school time.

### Planning

Peer assessment takes time and care to set up properly, and it is the professional teacher who has the skill to do this. Careful plans must be made for matching students, finding the right sort of materials, training helping and helped students, and many other points of organization. Like any other way of effective teaching, setting up peer helper projects needs enthusiasm, careful planning and hard work on the part of the teacher. Peer assisted learning is not an easy option.





Table 3.2 Peer Assessment Organization Template

This template should help to inform your initial thinking about your peer assessment project, help to structure the agenda of any subsequent collaborative planning meetings, form a useful record of the planning decisions agreed, and enable the consensus decisions to be communicated in a standard form to all the stakeholders.

The template lists the major questions to ask and areas of decision to consider when planning a peer assessment project. You will see that they are laid out under 12 main headings:

- A. Context
- B. Objectives
- C. Curriculum Area
- D. Participants
- E. Helping Technique
- F. Contact
- G. Materials
- H. Training
- I. Process Monitoring
- J. Assessment of Students
- K. Evaluation
- L. Feedback

Do not be alarmed by the apparent size of the template. It lists many options, only some of which will be relevant to you. The template strives for a degree of generality that makes it applicable to all sorts of peer assessment projects, hopefully without losing too much specificity and practicality.

You will find it useful to print off a copy of the template. As and when you make your final decisions, write them on the template as a record. This will constitute a useful organizational summary to copy and distribute to other interested parties. Inevitably, you will find you need more space under some headings than is actually provided. When photocopying the template for onward use, you could enlarge the first version to give yourself more space.

Some of the sections of the template are inter-dependent (e.g. D Selection of Participants and E Technique of Helping). Thus you might not be able to finalize all your decisions in one linear pass through the template – you might need to loop back to revisit some sections.

Good luck!

#### A: The Context

1. Are you in:
  - o an elementary school?
  - o a middle school?
  - o a high school?
  - o a kindergarten?
  - o a special school?
  - o other? (please specify)
2. Problems specific to the situation
  - o to be addressed by the peer assessment project?
  - o likely to impair the success of the project?
    - i. low motivation and expectation in students, poor goal-setting?
    - ii. low standards of attainment?
    - iii. poor on-task behavior, students often seeking teacher attention?
    - iv. poor inter-group relationships?
    - v. high incidence of behavior problems?
    - vi. ethnic minorities, second language, special needs?
    - vii. inappropriate accommodation, curriculum, teaching methods?
    - viii. other?
3. What supports are available:
  - i. from teacher colleagues in school?
  - ii. from head teacher or other senior teacher(s)?
  - iii. from outside agencies and helpers?
  - o Who will stand in your way? How will you get round this?
  - o Who will give only verbal support but no action?

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- Who will give practical help in time?
- Who will give practical help in resources?

### **B: Objectives**

Specify the objectives of the PAL project:

- formative or summative assessment? Or both?
- or formative leading to summative?
- objectives in observable, operational, and preferably measurable terms
- in what curriculum area (expanded later)?
- with which students (expanded later)?
- in which of the relevant domains:
  - attainment (cognitive)
  - meta-cognitive (insight into learning processes)
  - attitudinal, motivational (affective)
  - social
  - teacher time saving?

For the helpers:

- i.
- ii.
- iii.

For the helped:

- i.
- ii.
- iii.
  - How does this align with existing instructional goals and objectives?
  - Do you think it is feasible, or is it over-ambitious? Keep it simple to start!
  - Do you think you and your students will enjoy doing it?

### **C: Curriculum Area and Products to Be Peer Assessed**

- reading – oral reading? word recognition? decoding? comprehension?
- language – expressive and/or receptive?
- thinking skills and problem solving
- writing – creative or technical? single item or portfolio?
- spelling – words or general skills?
- second, other and foreign languages
- mathematics
- science
- information and communication technology skills
- physical education
- music
- other (the possibilities are endless):

What products will be assessed? For example:

- writing
- drawing
- oral statements
- presentations
- portfolios
- movement
- performance
- other?
  - Please be specific when you define the products.
  - Will there be single or multiple assessments?
  - How will this align with and complement the mainstream curriculum? (Your head teacher will ask this question!)
  - How might this conflict with the mainstream curriculum?
  - What will peer assessment during class time displace (in other words, what will you not do to enable you to do peer assessment)?



## D: Selection and Matching of Participants

1. Arrangements to introduce peer assessment to students gently
  - How will you deal with student resistance?
  - Will there be cultural resistances?
  - Do students understand/expect interdependence?
  - Is there a supportive classroom climate?
  - Is there a degree of trust and psychological safety?
  - Voluntary or compulsory? Or voluntary initially?
2. Structural Factors:
  - within or between institutions or buildings?
  - within or between classes?
  - class-wide or a selected sub-group?
3. Background Factors:
  - Experience of students? Pre-existing skills?
  - Previous experience positive or negative?
  - Current maturity, work habits, co-operative ethos, etc.Helpers:                      Helped:
4. Matching selective, random or accidental?
5. Age:  
same-age or cross-age (cross-grade) helpers?
6. Numbers of Participants (target totals)  
Helpers:                      Helped:
7. Contact Constellation  
Assessors individuals, pairs or groups (what size)?  
Assessee individuals, pairs or groups (what size)?  
\_\_\_\_\_ helpers to \_\_\_\_\_ helped
8. Ability
  - cross-ability or same-ability? (same-ability to start?)
  - ? range of ability in:   Helpers:                      Helped:
  - how do you know this? what indicators for ranking?
  - how to maintain a helper/helped differential?
  - special needs?           Helpers:                      Helped:
  - special strengths?       Helpers:                      Helped:
9. Fixed or reciprocal roles?
10. Social Factors
  - how to accommodate existing positive or negative relationships?
  - how to accommodate weak and strong personalities?
11. Gender  
same-sex or cross-sex matching?
12. Participant Partner Preference  
accept to what degree if at all?   Helpers:                      Helped:
13. Standby Helpers  
back-up/spare/supply helpers to cover absence/dropout?  
From?                      How many?
14. Recruiting (if voluntary)  
in person, in writing, advertising, publicity, grapevine?  
Helpers:                      Helped:
15. Parental Agreement  
necessary? How much information to give?  
Helpers:                      Helped:

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16. Incentives/Reinforcement  
for recruiting, necessary?  
For helpers? For helped?
17. Peer assessment to be confidential or public?
18. Peer assessment partner(s) to be anonymous or known?

#### **E: Helping Technique**

- Task surface or complex, or developing from one to another?
- Assessment criteria clear?
- Students involved in developing and clarifying assessment criteria?
- Will there be an assessment rubric?
- Peer assessment to be face-to-face or online, synchronous or asynchronous?
- Interaction with guiding prompts, sentence openers, cue cards or other scaffolding devices?
- Role of questioning in feedback? By assessor, assessee?
- Equal talk and discussion – assessor not “expert”?
- Quantity of feedback?
- Nature of feedback (oral, written, etc.)?
- Elaborated and specific or concise and general?
- Feedback positive, negative, or both?
- Feedback quantitative or qualitative or both?
- Feedback reinforcing, suggestive, didactic or corrective?
- Justification of feedback expected? (Think before you speak!)
- Participants clear about degree of reworking?
- Revisions to be few or many, simple or complex?
- Activity highly structured (initially) or student interpreted (later)?
- General helping skills relevant?
  - e.g. presentation, explanation, modeling, demonstration, prompting, checking, error identification, process monitoring, assessment, feedback, remediation
- General social skills relevant?
  - e.g. establishing rapport, sharing interest, verbal and non-verbal social skills, etc.
- Praise
  - specify frequency of, and circumstances for, praise.
  - verbal and non-verbal, must be genuine! - and how to avoid criticizing.
- Trouble-shooting
  - what do they do if they hit problems?

#### **F: Contact**

1. Scheduled or as-needed?  
if latter, how ensure initial fluency in technique?
2. Whole class simultaneously or rotating groups?
3. Time
  - class time/recess or break time/both/after school?
  - times fixed for all or various by negotiation?
4. Place
  - school or other center?
  - classroom/leisure or play area/other?
  - outside school? Homes, community centers, libraries?
  - consider movement or transport implications
  - check seating availability and acoustic absorbency (noise!)
5. Duration  
15, 20, 30, 45, 60 minutes?



6. Frequency
  - 3, 4, 5, 10 times weekly?
7. Project Period
  - 6, 8, 10 weeks, 1 semester (term), longer?
8. Problems
  - in cross-age/class/institution helping, how to match timetables?
  - and how much disruption from student movement?
9. Other Activities
  - for students who do not wish to participate?
  - for PAL students who finish early?

### G: Materials

Materials may be simple and readily available. Or they may not be readily available and need to be obtained.

1. Origin
  - regular classroom materials?
  - specially made materials?
  - students or adults to prepare specially made materials?
2. Structure
  - highly structured and sequenced or flexible and open-ended?
3. Difficulty
  - finely graded and of controlled difficulty?
4. Choosing
  - open choice, or open within a specific level?
  - how much choosing practice before giving guidance?
5. Availability
  - expensive hardware required? Cost of consumables?
  - can pairs or other volunteers make materials?
6. Sources
  - in-house existing materials
  - library loan
  - special collection
  - import from other establishments
  - material from participants' homes?
7. Access
  - how frequent and easy is access to the materials?
  - who takes the initiative on access, helper or helped or other?
8. Progression
  - who determines when to move onto other material, and how?
9. Recording
  - what recording system for loan/possession of materials?
  - is it quick and efficient?
  - handled by specialist or by helpers/helped?
  - who replenishes stock gone missing?

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## **H: Training**

1. Staff Training
  - all relevant professionals fully conversant with materials and techniques?
2. Participant Training – Organization
  - i. Grouping
    - individual or group?
    - assessors and assessees separately or together or both?
  - ii. Venue
    - date/time/place?
    - number/length of sessions?
  - iii. Audio-visual Equipment
    - available/working?
    - other teaching aids?
  - iv. Materials
    - available, pre-selected?
    - controlled for practice?
  - v. Practice Space
    - check seats/noise levels
3. Participant Training – Content
  - i. Verbal Instruction
    - keep it brief!
  - ii. Written Instruction
    - pamphlets, checklists, flowcharts, reminders
  - iii. Demonstration
    - from teacher (role play) or experienced helper or on video
  - iv. Guided Practice and Feedback
    - helpers and helped directly, or by role play?
  - v. Mastery Checking
    - of individual pairs – how many checkers available?
  - vi. Extra Coaching
    - for those in need – how many coaches available?
  - vii. Organization
    - briefing about organizational issues, contact, records, etc.
  - viii. Contracting – in some/all cases?

## **I: Process Monitoring**

1. Self-referral
  - by helper or helped – to whom?
  - how available is “expert” help?
  - what sort/size of problems to be referred?
2. Self-recording
  - by helper or helped or both?
  - for every session or less frequently?



- positive and negative aspects, or just positive?
  - what criteria and/or vocabulary?
  - checking records – who, when, where, how often?
3. Peer discussion
    - group or individual?
    - helpers and helped separate or together?
    - frequency and duration of review meetings?
  4. Direct Observation
    - by far the most revealing!
    - checklist of criteria/desired behavior to hand?
    - by project coordinator or spare helper or other?
    - video or audio-tape for feedback purposes?
  5. Coaching by supervisory staff
    - Observe
    - Observe + jointly intervene with assessor
    - Intervene to show assessor what is required
    - Return later to check performance
  6. What for early and late finishers?
  7. Reliability/validity moderated by supervising teachers?
  8. Project Process
    - what checks on organizational aspects?
    - frequency/duration of review meetings between professionals?
    - need/procedures for minimizing noise or movement levels?
    - what other adjustment/modifications are needed?
  9. Recognition of Successful Students
 

immediate celebration/recognition for following/succeeding with the PAL strategy
  10. Need to watch for cheating or other fraud?

#### **J: Formative Assessment of Continuous Student Progress**

1. Examine the quality of peer feedback now and over time
2. Over time, moderate reliability and validity of feedback
3. Feedback this information to students
4. Direct observation by the teacher of learning outcomes.
5. What social, communicative transferable skills observed/measured?
6. Teacher checks on student self-recorded evidence of progress through materials
7. Teacher checks peer-administered tests or probes integral to helping procedure
8. Teacher curriculum based measurement
 

(generalization tasks, probes, mini-tests delivered and scored by the teacher)
9. Computer assisted curriculum based assessment
 

(delivered or/and scored by computer)
10. Computer assisted norm-referenced adaptive assessment
 

(assessing generalization, delivered or/and scored by computer, preferably items selected randomly from large item bank on each occasion, can be used frequently without large practice effects)
11. Extrinsic or intrinsic rewards?

#### **K: Evaluation (Summative)**

1. Purpose of the Evaluation
 

if there's no purpose, don't do it!
2. Peer Assisted Evaluation
 

How can you engage students in the evaluation process?

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3. Current Assessment Practice
  - extend to give time series data? (i.e. pre-project gains c.f. project gains)
4. Research Design
  - pre-post/baseline/comparison group/etc?
  - separate measures for helpers/helped?
5. Normative Testing
  - standardized tests assessing generalization to compare with “normal” expectation?
  - or before and after (pre- and post-test)?
  - computer assisted? (delivered or/and scored by computer),
6. Criterion-Referenced Testing
  - mastery testing to see if specific tasks/skills/information learnt – gives better results!
  - error frequency counts, materials mastered, increased speed, etc?
7. Individual vs. Group Testing
  - the quick and unreliable vs. the slow but detailed
  - individual testing on small sample?
8. Attitudinal Data
  - from individual or group interview/discussion?
  - from questionnaires, checklists, ratings?
  - other observers’ subjective reaction?
9. Social Gains
  - improved relations or behavior?
  - how to measure? checklists, sociometry, disciplinary referrals?
10. Self-report Data
  - analyze and relate to other outcomes
11. Other Process Data
  - attendance, mean session length, observation checklists, etc.
12. Spin-off
  - observations of unpredicted side effects – positive and negative!
  - generalization to other participants, times, materials, subject areas, etc.
  - generalization to state or national test or examination results, etc.
13. Follow-up
  - short- and long-term follow-up data highly desirable

## **L: Feedback**

1. Collation of Information
  - who co-ordinates this?
  - how variously for different consumers?
2. Data Analysis
  - how to summarize?
  - what balance of verbal/numerical/graphic?
  - analysis of statistical significance? educational significance?



### 3. Feedback to Participants

- group or individual?
- helpers/helped separate or together?
- verbal/written/audio-visual?

### 4. Feedback from Participants

- group or individual?
- verbal or written?
- any suggestions for improvement?

### 5. Further Contracting

- continue peer assessment/stop/reduce frequency?
- change peer assessment method?
- change peer assessment technique?
- change subject area?
- change pairings?
- change organization?

### 6. Accolades/Recognition

- assessors and/or assessees?
- public commendation?
- academic credit?
- certificates, badges, etc.?

