



Centre for Education Action Research

الهيئة العامة للتعليم  Al-Futtaim Education Foundation

# SHOWING PROGRESS IN LESSONS IN A PRIMARY SCHOOL

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## Introduction

This article reviews an action research pilot study into how to effectively show children's learning progress during the course of lessons at a British Curriculum primary school in Dubai, awarded Outstanding status by the Dubai School Inspection Board (DSIB), 2024. Whilst the school showed outstanding progress through its summative data and external assessments, it was noted by the inspectorate that it was not always clear whether, during the course of a lesson, children were making clear progress against the learning goals of that session. The Authors, along with the senior leadership of the school, believed this to be an important consideration and one which merited further investigation. By reflecting on what progress looked like in a lesson for teaching staff, the project also looked to consider how the pupils understood their learning goals and how they could reflect on their learning journey towards them.

## Background of the Problem

The setting for this research was an independent private British-Curriculum primary school in Dubai, UAE, the school is a fee-paying school with 1006 children on roll for the academic year 2023/24. Specific consideration of how to judge progress within the context of a lesson had been discussed prior to this research project but no in-depth analysis had yet taken place.

## Methods

The action research project considered multiple texts but cited the work of three in particular. These were: *Unlocking student success: The power of success criteria, relationships and clarity* (Egan, 2023) which advocates the value of producing focused learning goals for each lesson and also the use of clear visuals to help children understand the progress they have made. *How can we demonstrate rapid progress in our lessons?* (Williams, 2016) which champions the effectiveness of well-embedded progress checks; and *Top 5 tips to show progress in lessons* (Sargent, 2015) which promotes the use of child-led progress checks supported by strong teacher questioning.

## Methods

We chose to use Action Research as our research method as its flexibility offered us the ability to make changes throughout the pilot based on what we were observing. This was particularly useful during a short pilot such as this where any pause to reconsider a wholesale approach would have been costly in terms of data collection.

## Methodology

The project had 3 main areas of focus:

1. **Redefining Success Criteria**- to be clear, concise and focused around a specific verb. These had to be easily and thoroughly understood by the cohort of pupils so they could ultimately review their learning progress against them within the context of the lesson.
2. **Introduction of Pupil Pit Stops**- designated checkpoints where children were asked to consider their progress against the Success Criteria (Learning Goals) of the lesson.
3. **Use of a Reflection Visual**- A simple template on which children could mark their perceived progress (against the specific Success Criteria) during the course of a lesson.

## **Participants**

Our participants were:

- 4 Year 5 classes
- Year 4 class
- 1 Year 3 class
- 1 Arabic class
- 1 Islamic class
- 1 Year 2 STEAM class

Foundation Stage 2 classes were also included in the pilot but with a focus on their assessed progress rather than their perceived progress. Due to their age, FS children did not complete the data collection tasks and therefore are not represented in the data.

## **Data Collection**

Our data was the following:

- Qualitative: Teacher Verbatim about the effect of the pilot study and Child verbatim about their experience of the pilot study.
- Quantitative: Results form a short weekly impact survey completed by the children.

## **Data Analysis**

Our analysis focused on the returns of a weekly online survey which children completed at the end of each week of a 3-week pilot period. The children were asked to provide a score out of 5 for the following questions:

1. How well do you understand the 'Working model'? This is an internal reflection model which represents different levels of understanding:  
Paddling - Emerging knowledge; Snorkeling - solid grasp of fundamentals; Diving - Expanding knowledge; Deep Sea Diving - Deep understanding with thirst for further learning.
2. How confident are you that you made progress against your Success Criteria?
3. How confident are you at showing progress using your Reflection Visual?

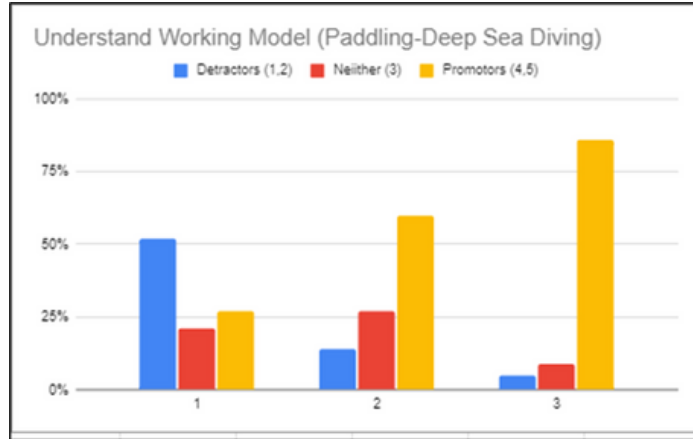
Any score of 4 or 5 was considered a 'Promoter'. A score of 1 or 2 was considered a 'detractor,' whilst a score of 3 was considered 'indifferent'. Children having confidence in being able to reflect and adjudge their progress would be high 'promoter' scores for each question by the end of the pilot period.

This qualitative data was then supplemented by the consideration of child and staff verbatim which the project coordinators collected at the end of the project by asking the question "What are your thoughts about this research project?"

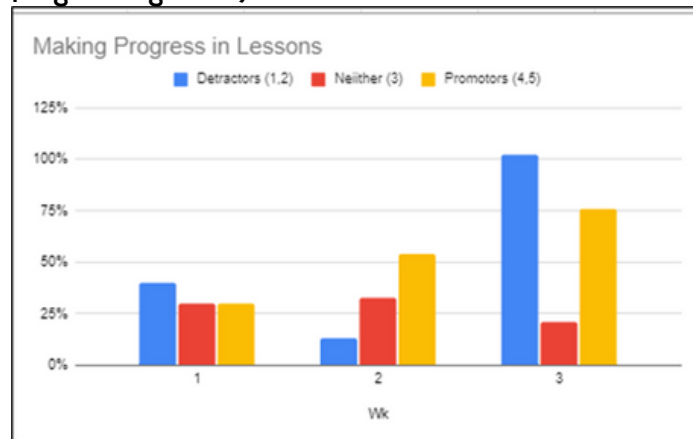
## Results

The series of bar charts shows the staged shift in confidence in all three areas of questioning over the course of the research project.

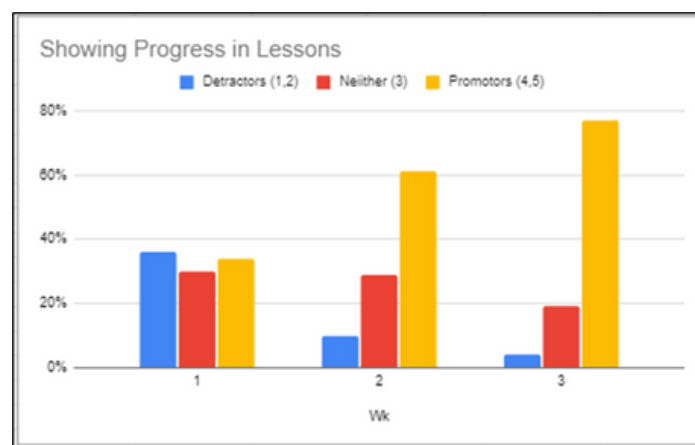
**Figure 1: How well do you understand the 'Working model' ?**



**Figure 2: How confident are you that you made progress against your Success Criteria?**



**Figure 3: How confident are you at showing progress using your Reflection Visual?**



## Examples of Child Verbatim

*"I liked it because it shows you how much you improved in the lesson. If you are finding something hard then it can show you where you need help." – Year 5 Yellow*

*"I really like the progress pitstop because now I can show my progress in a lesson. I can also show where I am in my learning, and if I got better at a specific thing." – Year 4 Green*

*"I like that the progress chart links to my learning and I can see how well I understand a lesson." – Year 3 Yellow*

## Examples of Teacher Verbatim

*"I have enjoyed using the Visual template with my class. I found that a few of my MA children felt very motivated to fill each box with information and in turn they progressed even further- really nice to see!" – Year 3 Teacher*

*"In STEAM, Year 2 students are using the Reflection Visual more effectively now as they are getting used to the language and how to self assess against the success criteria." – Year 2 STEAM Teacher*

*"I liked that this tool enabled me to direct my learning with questioning using the success criteria. I also liked that it was actually a tool to boost confidence; a child in my class rated his understanding as only paddling, however was then able to tell me more about what he knew and answer questions about his learning, showing to him that he had made more progress than he initially thought" – Year 5 Teacher*

## Discussion and Reflections

The results indicated that over the short pilot period, the sample children grew in confidence in their ability to interpret the working model used in school and utilise it to reflect on their progress within lessons. The increase in promoter scores also indicates an improved sense of making progress against the specific learning goals established by the carefully considered Success Criteria. The pilot also showed an increase in children's confidence in being able to show progress within their lessons. The Verbatim of staff and children show the pilot to be a positive experience which showed the start of the embedment of positive practice in regular lessons. The immediate impact of this pilot has been to establish the three key elements of the pilot in the regular practice of the participant teachers.

## Conclusion

This project has been valuable to the participant school in addressing an area highlighted as in need of action from its most recent DSIB inspection. It has also introduced a significant number of teaching staff to the process of carrying out action research which, it is hoped, will inspire further action research projects to come.

The next steps for this action research project are to run a secondary pilot over the course of the next term across an expanded sample of Key Stage 1 and 2. The outcome of this secondary pilot will be used to assess impact and inform a decision of whether to roll out the practice as standard from term 2.

## References

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