



Replacing written marking in English with metacognitive learning strategies/live marking: the impact on pupil outcomes and teacher workload

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PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

When teachers at St. Andrew's School were consulted on workload, written marking of English books was cited as one of the most time-consuming tasks. Furthermore, there was a lack of clarity regarding the purpose of written comments. Lesson observations and work scrutiny demonstrated that feedback practices across the school were inconsistent; teachers were using varied approaches with different expectations and the impact of feedback was difficult to gauge.

Following consultation with other schools, and findings from the Report of the Independent Teacher Workload Review Group (March 2016), we decided to implement a research project which would provide data, both quantitative and qualitative, on the impact of replacing written feedback in English books with metacognitive strategies/live marking.

THE RESEARCH DESIGN

A pre-and post-test matched-pairs design was used. To define the independent variable (marking), after case-matching, participants were randomly allocated to one of two conditions:

- Control condition (IV Level 1) – continuation of current marking policy
- Intervention (IV Level 2) – live marking/metacognitive strategies used to replace written marking

Dependent variables

The following measures were used:

- DV1 (attainment) – pre- and post-test
- DV2 (teacher well-being) – pre- and post-test
- DV3 (teacher time) – post-test only
- DV4 (pupil perception) – pre- and post-test

The design allowed for the testing of the following hypotheses:

- H1 – Pupil attainment as measured by assessment of independent writing will not be negatively affected by reducing marking
- H2 – Teacher's perceptions of wellbeing will improve as a result of no written marking in English books
- H3 – Teachers will spend less time doing written marking
- H4 – Teachers will devise more effective feedback methods

LIMITATIONS

Due to the relatively small sample size, this trial will require replication across greater numbers to confirm the validity of results. Some of the results may have been affected by a range of minor variables, e.g. teachers' style and experience, use of varied feedback strategies and the length of the treatment window.

METHODS

Participants, sample size and randomisation

Six classes from across the school (in years 2, 4 and 6) were involved in the study; three in the control group and three in the intervention group. All pupils in the six classes contributed to our pupil voice data. The sample size used in measuring attainment totalled thirty (fifteen pupils in the control and fifteen in the intervention group), while six teachers contributed to our staff well-being perception.

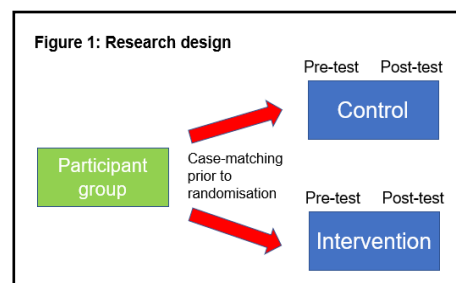
Procedures

At the commencement and completion of the treatment window (one term), all pupils completed a questionnaire to gauge their perception of the efficacy of teacher feedback. Simultaneously, to measure the effect on pupil attainment, moderation of sample writing was carried out both pre- and post-test on five randomly selected children in each class. Scores were generated measuring progress over the eight-week treatment window in the following key curriculum strands: composition, grammar and punctuation, spelling and handwriting/writing stamina.

Materials (and apparatus)

To measure teacher well-being, all teachers from the six classes completed a pre- and post-test questionnaire using questions from the International Personality Item Pool (IPIP) (Goldberg et al., 2006)*. Time spent on written feedback was recorded by the control group, in line with the current marking and feedback policy. The intervention group recorded time spent utilising non-written feedback strategies, e.g. adapting planning based on post-learning reflection or use of whole class editing prompts.

*Working too hard (Simms, et al., 2011); Optimism; Enthusiasm; Love of Learning (Peterson & Seligman, 2004); Self-efficacy (Costa & McCrae, 1992)



CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This research suggests that written feedback does not have a negative impact on pupils' attainment. Furthermore, it would appear that by utilising a variety of feedback strategies, separate from written marking, pupils' attainment is improved. The feedback strategies substantially reduced workload, creating time for adapting lessons to the needs of the pupils. Teachers in the intervention group were unanimous in their positivity for the project and in their reluctance to return to written feedback. There was also agreement that written marking strategies were not as effective as teachers had previously assumed.

"I'd spend my time feeding back to children about what I'd written. I would hope that they'd respond, but it had become an arduous process to make them respond."

(Year 2 class teacher, reflecting on pre-test marking)

"There is that dread when you see a stack of books and think that this is my next three hours. You never got that feeling because it was quicker and I had the chance to read writing for enjoyment, rather than stopping every couple of seconds to correct something, or to note something they'd missed. It made me assess them differently because I'd think about cohesion and structure and each child's quirks and personality, more than the non-negotiables, which children should be finding for themselves in Year 6."

(Intervention teacher, Year 6)

RESULTS

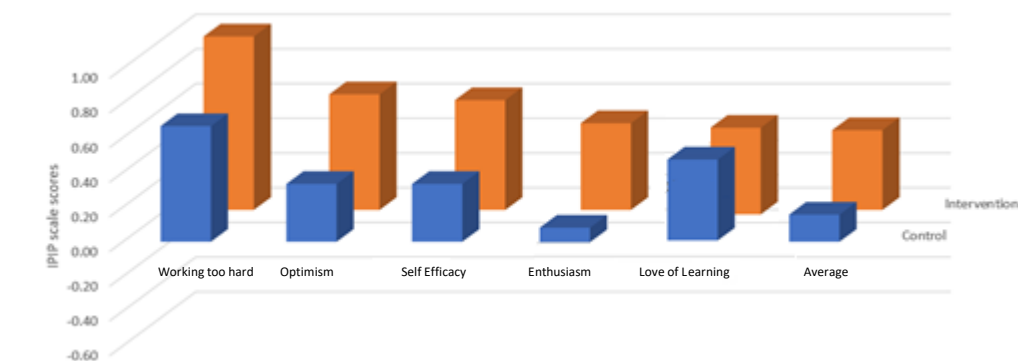


Figure 2: Change in teacher well-being

Overall, teacher well-being improved in all areas with the exception of 'Love of learning' which declined during the treatment period in both the control and intervention group. For the intervention group, this can be attributed to one teacher who stated that time reading and consulting the library or internet had decreased towards the end of the term. This is unlikely to be attributed to a lack of written marking.

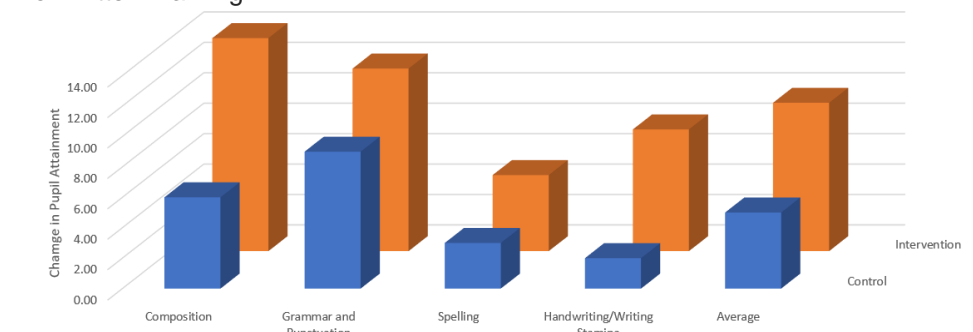


Figure 3: Change in writing attainment scores

Figure 3 shows the writing attainment scores in the control and the intervention group in the key areas of English writing in the primary curriculum. In all strands, the intervention group showed greater progress within the timeframe than the control group. Average writing attainment score was assessed using an inferential test and the effect size calculated. A two-tailed Wilcoxon signed-ranks test indicated that the intervention had a significant ($p = 0.005$) positive ($r = 0.515$, CI (95%) = 0.403 – 0.627) effect compared to the condition.

This research was carried out with funding and support from the Department for Education and Education Development Trust.

