

How does immediate feedback support pupil progress in writing and does this have greater impact than post lesson marking?

Orchard School, Upper KS2 Phase

Abstract

The focus of the research was to explore how progress can be maximised during a literacy unit and the impact of verbal feedback versus post-lesson written feedback. The importance of effective feedback hasn't been disputed; however the way that the feedback is given is undertaken very differently within many schools, federations and local authorities. The research took place over a period of months, looking and comparing outcomes across both fiction and non-fiction units of work.

Introduction

Orchard is a larger than average primary school, with three form entry per year group. Located in the diverse borough of Hackney, London and has exceeded the national average for the end of Key Stage assessments.

At Orchard, a 'cold write' assessment task is undertaken at the start of a unit that relates to the final outcome. A target is then given to a child that can be taught and applied throughout the unit before a final 'hot write' which provides an opportunity for independent application of learnt literary technique. The target setting following a cold write ensures that the children have a bespoke target and a focus assessment point throughout the unit of work.

The marking policy at Orchard ensures that all children are catered for: it lays out simple and effective ways to mark to support children or challenge children throughout or within the lesson. However, written marking can take time, particularly when done after a lesson. Verbal feedback means that more children can be spoken to and thus can mitigate a greater percentage of misconceptions across a class. It can also provide invaluable summative assessment for the adult to then utilise during whole class teaching moments, such as modelling, editing or as starters. Verbal feedback supports application of new knowledge or prior knowledge through quick intervention, (Elliot et al., July 2020). This of course would lead to a faster rate of progress within a lesson, rather than relying on written feedback and reflection the next day. This is also highlighted in the questionnaire (undertaken by Elliot et al. in 2020) of senior leaders and teachers across the country, where the majority of teachers said that 'instant/live feedback' is the most purposeful as it allows for '*students to correct misconceptions in the moment, and then build on their learning with the correct grounding.*' It has also been noted that '*studies of verbal feedback that indicate that learners find it easier to improve if their mistakes are corrected quickly.*' (Education Endowment, Elliot et al., 2016).

Sarah Brookhart states that individual conversations with pupils about their work can be 'appreciated' by the students, and gives opportunity for pupils to reason with adults about what they have written. It also provides opportunity for them to find the mistakes – rather than the adult – which in turn develops them into more

independent learners. She also goes on to mention the way we speak to the pupils about their work matters, thus if the tone of voice is used correctly and the language used is appropriate, then this could have a greater impact than written marking too, (S. Brookhart, 2018).

Research Process

A focus group of 18 children, across 3 classes was selected. In each class, 6 children were chosen for immediate feedback methods, and 3 children from each class only received post lesson written feedback. This was decided in conjunction with the teachers in Year 6 classes. Within this, training was delivered to the teachers about how verbal feedback would be delivered to ensure consistency in approach.

After this discussion, planning was undertaken for literacy lessons: both fiction and non-fiction units. Success criteria were shared with the children and models and deliberate practice tasks identified within teaching inputs. These were the aspects that pupils needed to include in their writing – usually 2 ‘literary’ devices and a grammatical one (e.g. I can use similes to describe, I can choose the appropriate language for the genre, I can use brackets to add extra information). These were the criteria that the adults then used to feedback to the children throughout their independent task, be it through verbal (3 children) or written (3 children).

After a hot write, these outcomes were shared and discussed between teachers using key questions to guide discussion including: *how did the written feedback outcomes compare to the verbal feedback compare? Did they hit their success criteria and their ‘cold write’ target?* As well as being an effective assessment tool through comparing writing, it gave teachers opportunity to identify what had worked well and why.

Findings

Teachers found that those who had in class immediate feedback were more likely to use the skill, rather than those who had the written feedback, who might have misread what they needed to do or how to do it. Verbal feedback was also found to be particularly beneficial to those in lower attaining groups, as it meant that direction was clear and then could be acted on straight away. Children who had only verbal feedback responded better to the immediate feedback. They said that it was ‘easier to understand what the adult meant’, and that it also supported them better in being able to apply a new skill. Furthermore, adults who provided that verbal feedback could explain with greater efficiency what it was they wanted the child to do and provide a live model as a scaffold where needed. It also allowed teachers to assess threads of misconception more robustly, thus mini-plenaries throughout the lesson were much more effective in consolidating and developing knowledge in the moment.

Fig. 1

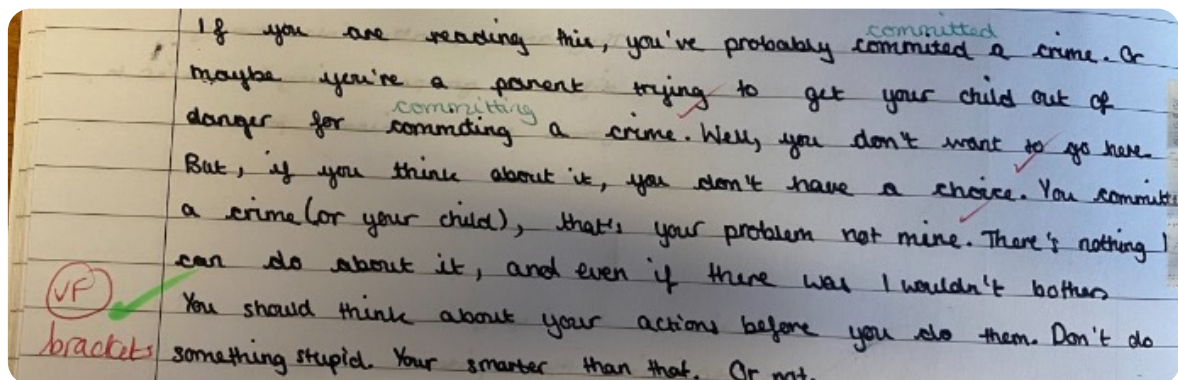
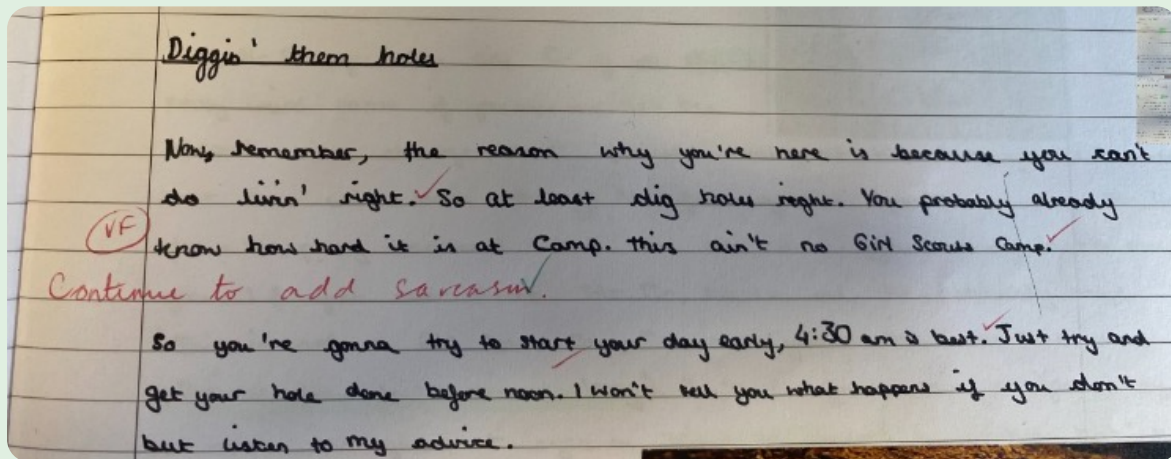


Fig. 2



As can be seen above (Fig. 1), brackets have been used accurately – this was achieved through verbal feedback. Fig. 2, 'sarcasm' (linked to writer's style) demonstrates how a difficult concept to explain was immediately evident in pupil work through verbal feedback. The examples above highlight the immediate impact that verbal feedback can have – as it was quick, well-thought through, it means that the child has managed to apply what they were taught, and the teacher was able to move quickly on to the next child in order to support them as required. One child stated that: '[verbal feedback] helps with hitting my success criteria and hitting my targets on my assessment grid. The verbal is better than written feedback because you can talk to the teacher to understand the feedback, rather than written feedback can sometimes be confusing.' Adults reported an increased percentage of pupils received personalised intervention and this had a greater impact for the child.

Pupils within the study were asked how they perceived written feedback and verbal feedback and there was a clear narrative across pupil responses which showed that verbal feedback for a child is a greater tool to use during a writing lesson as it provides that immediate feedback and pupils feel more confident using new and/or prior learning.

Teachers noted that it saved time post-lesson during marking. This is an interesting and valid point about saving time – if verbal feedback can have a similar (or greater) impact on the children as written feedback, the impetus should always be on bespoke, thoughtful feedback to children during a lesson.

Conclusion

One thing that became clear during this project is that written marking often tells children what they need to improve and where they have done something wrong rather than allowing them to develop these skills themselves through self or peer editing. Also, building the culture of learning from each other, and reading through each other's work to improve. The conclusion of the research shows on a small scale that verbal feedback aids progress in literacy to a much higher degree than written feedback. However, consideration would need to be given to the impact of a consistent model of just verbal feedback. In a class of thirty pupils vs time constraint for in the moment marking that not all pupils could or would receive the benefit of such personalised intervention. A recommendation for a wider study sample over a longer time could create a more precise evaluation of impact.

References

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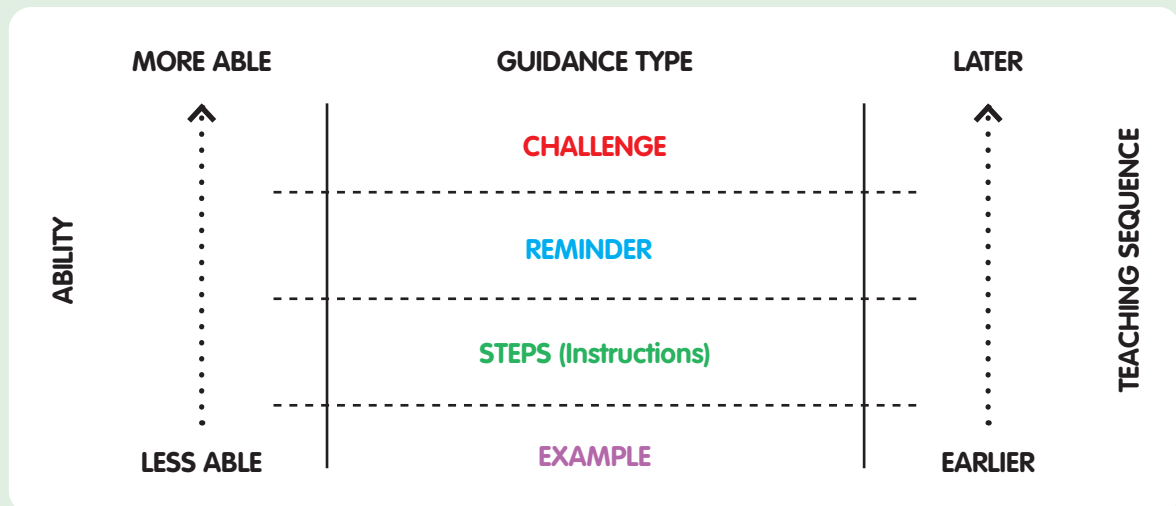
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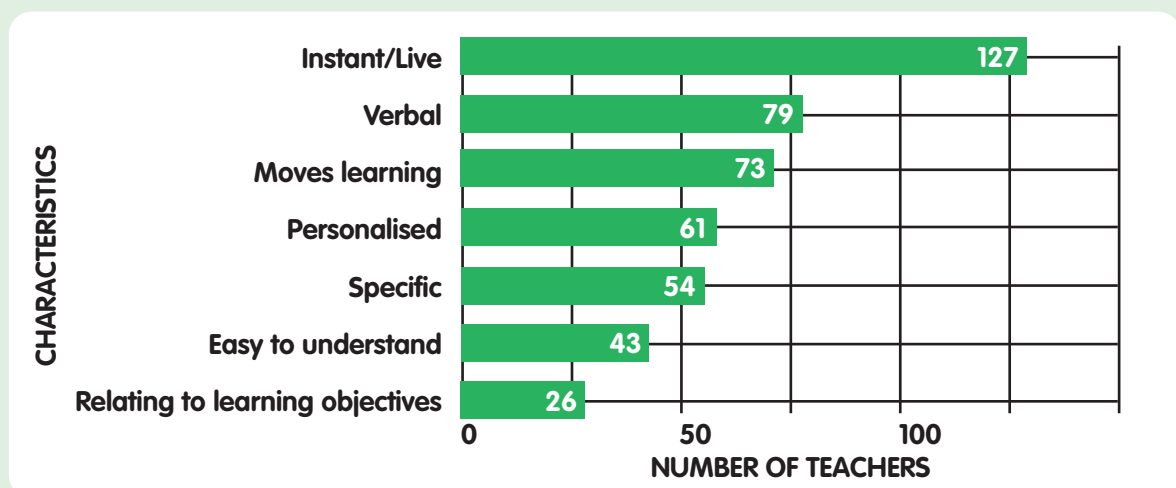
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Appendices

Appendix 1: Question guidance



Appendix 2: Research findings



Teacher response when asked 'what constitutes good feedback' over 51% of teachers responded with instant and live. (Elliott, V., Randhawa, A., Ingram, J., Nelson-Addy, L., Griffin, C. and Baird, J.A. (2020). *Feedback: Practice Review*. London: Education Endowment Foundation.)