

Title

Focus on Teacher Feedback: A small scale research study using teacher to learner feedback approaches to promote writing progression in two Primary 4 classes.

What did we ask? (Research Questions)

- How can teacher feedback impact upon writing attainment in Primary 4 (P4) learners?
- How can teacher feedback impact upon attitudes to writing in P4 learners?
- Does teacher feedback impact upon pupil ownership of their own learning?
- Does teacher feedback support learners in understanding visible learning? E.g. (learners will be able to articulate how well their writing meets the success criteria; what progress in their writing looks like).
- Does teacher feedback impact on classroom discussion / ethos?

What is the evidence base?

Visible learning theory (Hattie, 2009), with evidence validated through over 800 meta-analyses of international studies, identifies factors with the greatest impact on learning and progress. Research is clear that when “teachers see learning through the eyes of the learners and learners can become their own teachers” (Hattie & Yates, 2014), this has the greatest impact on attainment.

The Scottish Survey of Literacy and Numeracy (2016) highlights a national dip in achievement in literacy at the P4 stage. Between 2015 and 2017, literacy attainment has increased at each of the stages, P1, P4, P7, S1 and S3 in North Ayrshire (NA). In North Ayrshire Council (NA), the attainment gap between learners in SIMD 1 and 2 and those in SIMD 9 and 10 has reduced at all stages in reading, except P4. Although NA writing attainment across the P4 stage is above the national average, 71% of NA learners attain Cfe Level 1 by the end of P4 compared to 69% of P4 learners nationally, writing attainment is lower than reading, listening and talking, and numeracy attainment in NA. Therefore writing at P4 is viewed as a priority for intervention.

Feedback is considered a low cost, high impact intervention when delivered at the right time and at the right level for individual learners. In terms of learner progress, interventions with an effect size of 0.4 are considered to equate to one year’s progress for one year’s teaching (Hattie 2019). Feedback, with an effect size of 0.75 (Hattie 2019, EEF 2018) can significantly advance the rate of learning. The purpose of feedback is to close the gap between where the learner is and where they need to progress to. Feedback should be specific to the task whilst also relating to success criteria. Learners have a greater chance of understanding feedback if it is differentiated to the level they are working at and is delivered during a task rather than at the end. Hattie claims that ‘feedback is most powerful when it is from the student to the teacher’ (Hattie & Clarke (2019). When learners are listened to and their feedback is used to effect change in approaches to teaching within the classroom this can impact powerfully on learner engagement and progress.

Our initial research question focused on - “How can teacher feedback impact upon attainment and achievement in writing in a Primary 4 class?”. Our hypothesis was that through training and coaching with teachers, we could improve the quality of teacher feedback to learners and writing progress.

What did we do?

Poverty and disadvantage affect literacy skills (Scottish Government, 2015). In terms of closing the poverty related attainment gap, NA has allocated significant resources towards developing the expertise of teachers working predominantly with learners from SIMD 1 and 2. However given that the dip in writing achievement appears to affect learners across SIMD levels, this project focused on schools with predominantly SIMD 3 and 4 learners.

During initial consultation with schools and the Scottish government improvement advisor, it was agreed the focus should be on imaginative writing. Proposed outcomes were mapped against the National Improvement Framework (NIF) (See appendix 1). Two schools (A and B) were identified alongside a control school (Y). All three schools had a majority of learners from SIMD 3 and 4. Two P4 teachers participated in training on feedback and five coaching sessions (See appendix 2). There was a focus on a random sample of 10-12 learners for the 2 intervention schools to robustly track potential changes via additional measures (identified below with an Asterisk (**)). Implementation spanned 20 weeks.

A mixed-method design was adopted:

Feedback from learners:

- 3 cold writing assessments (September, January and February) where learners wrote about a topic with no advance preparation or support from their teacher during the writing process
- Learner feedback sheets** (developed by the research team)
- Oral narrative measure** (from Narrative Assessment Protocol)
- Motivation to write profile (adapted from Gambrell et al., 1996)
- Quality of feedback questionnaire (adapted from [www.evidence based teaching.org.au](http://www.evidencebasedteaching.org.au))
- Semi-structured interviews** (developed by the research team)

Feedback from P4 class teachers and head teachers:

- Thematic analysis of dialogue during coaching sessions (Miles & Huberman, 1994)
- Semi structured interviews pre and post with both class teachers and head teachers.
- End of intervention questionnaire with class teachers from school A and B
- Classroom Observations at weeks 0, 2, 10, 20 conducted by research assistant and 2 EPs (1 EP for school A and 1 EP for school B) [See sample observation schedule.](#)

What have we found?

Feedback from learners and measures stated above:

- No statistically significant results from pre to post whole class 'Motivation to Write' profile.
- An increase noted in the average response rating of learners pre to post stating '*I know how to be a good writer*' and '*knowing how to be a good writer is important.*' (School B)
- Increase in average response rating of learners pre to post stating "*When I get stuck with writing, I can usually work out what to do next.*" (School A)
- A shift from 'Don't Know' to 'Disagree' in response to: "*Writing is difficult*" and "*I get nervous when I have to do writing*" (School A)
- In both schools the majority of learners were clear on how to improve their writing e.g. quantity, use of vocabulary, connectives, openers and punctuation (VCOP).
- As weeks progressed, majority of learners stated they found writing tasks easier.

Feedback from P4 teachers and class teachers (see appendix 3):

- Implementation challenges – the two teachers selected to participate were put forward by HTs and implementation of recommendations during coaching was variable.
- Difference between how "quality" of writing is viewed and assessed.
- VCOP given emphasis in success criteria as opposed to the development of meta-cognitive skills, for example the importance of structure and the development of ideas.
- Greater teacher awareness and understanding of the levels of feedback (praise, task, process and self-regulation). All levels of feedback observed consistently, however the use of praise feedback increased when one teacher needed to respond to learners with self regulation needs. Disconnect observed between teacher and school support staff in terms of use of specific feedback.
- Peer to peer feedback could be increased in both schools.

Whilst not statistically significant, the results of this small-scale research are promising. Findings highlight that the intervention has impacted positively on teacher knowledge and skills in delivering effective feedback. Positive trends are noted in terms of learners' views of feedback and attitudes to writing.

What do we plan to do next?

Plans for next steps are as follows:

- Train and support a cluster of schools in implementing effective learner feedback. with refinements to implementation e.g. to support participant engagement and dissemination of learning across the school, including SMT and support staff.
- Plans were made to quantify writing progress however incomplete data sets meant effect sizes could not be calculated. Next steps will include quantifying writing progress in the cluster project.
- Share learning with NA's Professional Learning Academy to support high quality learning and teaching specifically in relation to writing
- Consult Scottish Government improvement advisor on further implementation and evaluation.

- Continue to support schools with development work providing evidence – validated information, support and challenge conversations, and data analysis.

References

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