What happens when pupils are provided with real-time formative feedback?

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Group 1B

Rationale

Feedback is a crucial component of formative assessment which Black and Wiliam (2001) define as, "all activities undertaken by teachers and students in assessing themselves, providing information to be used as feedback to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged." (Black and Wiliam, 2001, p.2). It follows from this that there are implications for both teachers and pupils in the use of formative assessment. As Sarris (2017) states, formative assessment "leads to a change in behaviour for both student and teacher." Stenger (2014) points out that that there can, essentially, be good and bad feedback. Badly presented feedback can be an impediment to learning and may adversely affect learners' morale. Looney (2010) provides a good example of "need to work harder" as inadequate feedback, as it fails to inform the pupil what he requires to do to improve.

Aims

There is extensive evidence in academic literature in support of the positive effects of formative assessment. Advantages associated with it, according to Black and Wiliam, include learning gains, particularly in relation to low attainers. It flags to learners specific problems with their work and gives them both a clear understanding of what is lacking and realistic targets for putting it right. It also avoids the pitfalls associated with summative assessment, such as over-emphasis on grades and a culture of competition between pupils instead of genuine learning. Given all this, the aims of this enquiry are to assess if pupils' confidence actually improves following real time feedback and to assess if pupils' understanding also improves.

Methodology

This was reasonably straightforward. I advised a series of different classes that I was carrying out some educational research for North Lanarkshire Council and, to aid me in this, I would like them to write a number in the margin of their jotters at a certain point in the lesson in order to indicate how comfortable they were feeling with learning being undertaken. The numerical scale used was as follows:

- 5: extremely comfortable/confident with what is being taught
- 4: reasonably comfortable with what is being taught
- 3: middle of the road/so so
- 2: struggling with parts of the learning
- 1: struggling with everything being taught

I would do this at approximately the mid-point of the lesson. After this, I would ask those who had written 3 and below what exactly it was that was causing them the difficulty and I would then attempt to address their concerns by giving immediate formative feedback. The lesson would then proceed on and at the end of the lesson I would ask the class to write

another number using the same scale as before, in order to ascertain whether the real time feedback had had any discernible effect on the learning taking place.

Findings

The results were both interesting and verging on being inconclusive. The first group I tried the intervention with was a fairly small S2 French class. There were eleven pupils present (four were absent). We were working on the topic of countries and nationalities. Seven of the pupils ended up writing the same number at each checkpoint. Of the remaining four pupils, the increase or decrease was by a single point. Two went up by a point and two, rather disappointingly, went down.

I next tried the intervention with my other S2 class; we were again studying countries and nationalities. This was a larger class of twenty pupils. Ten pupils wrote the same number at each checkpoint. Of the remaining ten pupils, nine went up by a single point and one went down by a point.

The third and last time I tried the intervention was with an S3 class. We are studying places in town. Of the thirteen pupils, nine had the same number at each checkpoint. Of the remaining four, one went up by two points, one went down by two and two went up by a single point.

Therefore, in each class, at least half, and often more, of the pupils were not finding that the feedback had any effect on their general understanding of what was being taught. However, encouragingly, of the pupils who recorded a change in their feelings, more indicated a positive change than a negative one.

Conclusions

Formative feedback, whilst no guarantee of an upward movement in the level of understanding of pupils, can have a role to play in the providing of learning gains.

Implications for Future Practice

I will continue to regularly use formative assessment as a tool in my day-to-day classroom practice. The results of this enquiry, whilst by no means as conclusive in favour of formative assessment as much of the academic literature on the subject might suggest, still indicate that it is a useful method for the promotion of teaching and learning.

Bibliography

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Looney, J. (2010). Making it Happen: Formative assessment and educational technologies. *Thinking Deeper Research Paper, 1*(3)*.

Sarris, N. (2017). Formative Assessment: Tracking Student Learning in Real Time

Stenger, M. (2014). 5 Research-Based Tips for Providing Students with Meaningful Feedback

Appendix

Class 2Q

Pupil	Pre-feedback	Post-feedback
Anisah	3	3
Ramiz	4	5
Chloe	5	4
Alannah	3	2
Rachel	2	2
Aiden	5	5
Aidan	5	5
Kayleigh	4	4
Anton	4	4
Ben	4	5
Aaisha	5	5

Class 2O

Pupil	Pre-feedback	Post-feedback
Ali	3	4
Joecele	4	4
Tommy	4	4
Madison	4	3
Ciaran	4	5
Cian	3	4
Matthew	3	3
Katie	4	4
Emma	4	4
Vicky	3	3
Kyle	3	4
Stevie	4	4
Olivia	2	3
Luke	4	4
Daniel	2	3
Erin	4	4
Peony	3	4
Abi	4	4
Emily	2	3
Alannah	3	4

Class 3Q

Pupil	Pre-feedback	Post-feedback
Rachael	4	4
Kieran	2	2
Holly	4	4
Christopher	4	4
Lisa	3	5
Sarah	4	4
Niamh	1	1
Marcel	3	4
Declan	3	4
Aidan	3	3
Amy Louise	1	1
Grant	4	4
Josh	4	2