Evaluating the success of instant verbal feedback as a formative assessment technique and the impact on learning and teaching.

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Rationale.

In 2010, the Scottish Government introduced a new educational curriculum 'Curriculum for Excellence', which replaced the previous 5-18 curriculum. An emphasis was placed upon interdisciplinary learning, skills developing and encouraging personal development. A key driver was to tackle the 'Scottish Attainment Challenge', achieving equity in educational outcomes and a focus on closing the poverty related attainment gap. The Scottish Government (2005) states 'learners learn best, and attainment improves, when learners are given feedback about the quality of their work, and what they can do to make it better'. I want to investigate whether one or the other is more effective on learner's attainment and any themes which may be apparent.

Assessment is For Learning has been described by John Hattie as making learning 'more visible' as it helps learners understand what excellence looks like and how they can develop their own work to reach their learning goals. Hattie (2011) researched the effectiveness of 150 factors on educational effectiveness and found that feedback ranked 10th in providing significant improvement in learner outcomes. My enquiry will be focussed on the effects of instant, verbal feedback.

Aim.

The aim of this enquiry was to examine what impact instant live feedback had on learning and teaching.

Methodology.

The enquiry took place over a four-week period in a mixed ability of 20 children, in a primary 2 class. Instant live feedback was the independent variable and I considered the ethical and moral importance of my enquiry

A focus group of four children were identified – 3 boys and 1 girl. These children often received written comments in their jotters regarding presentation, number formation and concentrating on their work as to complete in the time given. Student A and Student B were chosen as both are very confident learners regarding their numeracy work, but often written feedback would state 'please complete challenge questions', I often wondered why these children were not completing additional challenges. Student C was chosen as written feedback continuously highlighted number formation should be corrected. Student D was chosen as jotter presentation continuously lacked school policy, and even though I had modelled this numerous times on a one-to-one manner, the child would miss more boxes that necessary; double digits would be written in the one box, rather than a box each, and student D was chosen as work was often incomplete.

In order to conduct this small-scale enquiry, I kept a reflective diary to note down the effects of instant, live feedback; informal discussions, and exit passes were used to identify any

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codes or themes which mirrored children's effort. I also monitored numeracy jotters closely to inform myself any progression or deterioration in jotter presentation, effort and confidence. I was able to use the finding from the reflective diary observations and use them to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Lamb (1991) states that reflection 'can facilitate new understanding as information is perceived and then reflected upon…. Leading to understanding and learning about practice. Using a reflective diary encouraged critical analysis and thinking for my own professional practice and judgement, and in turn, allowed me to be reflective.

I followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six – phases of thematic analysis model, where I firstly familiarised myself with the data I had collected; noting down the initial findings; I then began to generate initial codes, using coloured highlighters, especially when analysing the reflective diary that I conducted; exploring as many potential codes and themes as possible. Creswell and Plano Clark (2007) identify thematic analysis as being able to provide 'more comprehensive and convincing evidence.

Findings.

The purpose of the enquiry was to determine whether live feedback was an effective assessment tool in improving teaching and learning. As the evidence of my enquiry was pupil centred, I was able to obtain a durable response from children, children were encouraged to 'have a voice' and be open and honest in their conversations regarding their effort and performance in numeracy.

At the start of the enquiry and throughout, I had numerous, verbal conversations with children about their opinions on feedback. I asked the children within my focus group if they ever found the written comments I had left as useful. Two of the four children said that they did, one child said they looked to see if they had got a sticker for their work and one said no, because they weren't able to read all of the words in the feedback given.

Throughout the enquiry it became apparent that children found verbal feedback effective in achieving their learning targets. It was evident that children's confidence and response to feedback was more effective than written comments in jotters. Live feedback was shown to aid the child whose number formation was a constant reminder in jotters; during live dialogue this child was able to correct and explain that it was 'the wrong way around'. I also witnessed the child whose pace was a concern, begin to finish their work more quickly and accurately, and the two children were moving onto challenging tasks.

Through verbal dialogue the children within the focus group stated they felt better about their work and could fix 'mistakes' instantly. One child even commented that before they didn't think they were good at maths, but now felt more confident in their ability.

From jotter monitoring, it was evident that live feedback had a positive effect on some children during the enquiry. It was evident that confidence had improved amongst some during numeracy as children were completing extension tasks and one pupil was showing a faster but accurate pace of work. During discussion, one child was able to correct number formation effectively, however this was not always evident when jotter monitoring; when the child was left to work independently, I would find 3 and 7 were of incorrect formation.

Conclusion

From the data explored it has shown that immediate verbal feedback is a beneficial assessment tool. Children were able to act upon feedback given and self-assess their own learning. Children became more confident in their work efforts and confidence grew; I was able to witness this through conversations with children and how they questioned and responded to questions posed by myself.

Importantly, this enquiry has influenced my professional judgement and pedagogy, it has shown that instant verbal feedback has positive effects on pupils to an extent and in future, I will ensure I implement live feedback. Although I know it is not the preference for all children to receive written or verbal feedback, I have learned that I can be responsive and adapt my teaching and classroom strategies to get the best out of every pupil and ensure I meet their needs. Moreover, this enquiry has taught me to be responsive and reflective as a practitioner, and to question and research everything that I implement to ensure sufficient evidence supports.

Future implications.

It is important to note that the enquiry was small scale and although informative, naturally there was some limitations. Firstly, the enquiry was conducted over a short period which included pupil absence. Furthermore, in hindsight, I would have gained a more reliable data collection, and explored other methodologies.

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