4 Feedback

This chapter deals with two aspects of feedback: oral and written, including marking. It focuses mainly on feedback from teacher to child, but this develops to include children's feedback to each other. Pupils' self-evaluation, dealt with in the previous chapter, involves a great deal of pupil feedback to the teacher.

Oral feedback when the class is at work

Various research studies have concluded that feedback is most useful when it focuses on the **learning intention** of the task, rather than other features of the work. However, research also shows that most teachers give feedback to children about four other features of their work before, or even instead of, the learning intention of the task:

- presentation (handwriting/neatness);
- surface features of writing (full stops, capital letters and especially spelling);
- quantity;
- effort.

It is easy to see why this happens: those aspects are most noticeable in children's work at first sight. They are also relatively straightforward to deal with. Ironically, these are the very things teachers accuse parents of focusing on at parents' evenings.

What can happen...

The children have been asked to cut out, order and then glue muddled-up pictures of a story onto a piece of paper.

Learning intentions and success criteria are displayed prominently as follows:

> **We Are Learning To:** Order stories.
>
> **How will we know we've done this?:** The pictures will be in the same order as the story we read.

- As the children start to work, the teacher notices that one child already has glue all over his trousers. She goes to the child and speaks to him, getting him to go quickly to the washroom to clean up. The rest of the group starts to fuss about glue. One child rushes to get a cloth as she notices glue on her table and the whole class starts to chat about glue or anything else....

- The teacher notices a child having difficulty cutting out and goes over to help her hold the scissors correctly, talking about how much better she is getting at this. One child tells the teacher that she's been able to cut out properly for a year now. Some children, having roughly cut out two of their pictures are now going back to them and cutting them out more neatly, because they don't want the teacher to criticise their cutting. They had not cut out neatly in the first place because they thought the emphasis was on ordering....

- The teacher passes a child who has, at last, written her name on the paper with a capital letter at the beginning of her name. She praises the child enthusiastically. Some of the children now cross out their names on their sheets, because they realise they had also forgotten to do this....

- The teacher congratulates one child who is working industriously, saying how pleased she is to see her working so hard. The children sit up straighter to get some praise themselves....

So far, the class knows that the learning intention and success criteria are a lie. The teacher has made clear by her words that what she is looking for is not the ordering, but presentation, surface features, effort and cutting skills.

An alternative approach...

The following scenario describes a strategy for giving feedback focused around the same learning intention:

■ As the children start to work, the teacher notices that one child already has glue all over his trousers. She goes to the child and first says something about the learning intention: *'Well done, I can see you've got the first picture in place. Now what happened next in the story, after the Little Red Hen had dug the ground?'* Some of the children quietly call out *'planted the seeds'* and continue with their ordering. The teacher then whispers to the child, *'You've got glue on your trousers. Go and clean up quickly.'*

■ The teacher notices a child having difficulty cutting out. She moves to her and congratulates her on cutting out all the pictures first: *'That's a very good strategy. You have cut out all the pictures first so that you can shuffle them around and change your mind.'* Some of the children are now peeling off their stuck-down pictures, because they agree that it is a very good strategy. The teacher then whispers to the child about holding the scissors.

So far, the class knows that the learning intention and success criteria are the truth. The teacher has made clear by her words that what she is looking for is *ordering*.

This technique has been received very powerfully by teachers, who realise how often they have fallen into the trap of focusing on other features and distracting the class from the prime focus of their learning. One teacher said:

❛ *I recognised things in myself like commenting about the handwriting and spelling, when I should be commenting on the learning intention. It's been a real revelation to me. I'm aware of it all the time now and when I hear myself starting to say "You've left a capital letter out there", I stop really quickly now and go back to talking about the learning intention.* ❜

It takes a while to get into the habit, but the strategy is simple: hold on to the thought about the secondary feature and make sure that something about the learning intention

is mentioned *first*, then mention the glue or handwriting, if it is necessary, in a whisper. The class will retain their focus on the learning intention, which will be apparent in their improved work.

Marking

Research shows that marking is often directly responsible for *regression* in many pupils, and that traditional practice tends to demoralise and overwhelm pupils, with children often making no sense of it. Bearing in mind the urgent need to improve children's writing, in particular, it is timely to begin to reconsider current beliefs and practices in marking.

The problems

Stuck in a rut

One of the problems about marking is that teachers are often embedded in a way of working which is hard to break. Teachers have typically marked children's work by automatically correcting spelling errors and other surface features, acting as a copy editor in a publishing firm, then providing comments at the end. The information is too much for children to process. Teachers often feel that they are marking for an inspector or for parents, when the main purpose of the marking feedback should be to give information to *children* about how well they did against the learning intention.

Giving children too many criteria at the beginning of a task

After sharing learning intentions and making sure children know what to do, it is often the case that the children are then given up to six more learning intentions to pay attention to (e.g. *'What I'm looking for in this letter to the Prime Minister is that you have used persuasive language. Oh, and don't forget your best handwriting, correct spellings, capital letters and full-stops, grammar, punctuation and paragraphs.'*) Children now have seven criteria to deal with in perhaps 20 or 30 minutes.

Research shows that, in these circumstances, children pay most attention to what the teacher makes clear, by her actions, means the most to her. So a teacher who continually mentions handwriting will have beautiful handwriting in her class, but the children will be producing less work than they could. Always focusing on handwriting slows children down.

The same is true for spelling. Research shows that children can only spell correctly words that they *know* how to spell, so it is of little use to tell them to make sure their spellings are correct. Children learn to spell by the specific teaching of spelling (word- and sentence-level work), by looking at patterns and doing work where a spelling rule is the learning intention, and also by reading. Asking children to check spellings continuously only leads to spelling becoming too dominant in the writing process. Children worry disproportionately about their spelling and get out of their seats to look up words, often talking to other children on the way. They have by then often lost the thread of their sentence. Ironically, copying out the correct spelling in their work from the word book does not then help them to spell that word correctly the next time they want to use it. It has wasted their time. Worrying about spelling also stops children trying adventurous words and can lead to misspelt words being 'corrected' by them to an alternative misspelt word, or worse, a correct spelling can be 'corrected' by the child so that it is then misspelt.

Expecting children to apply all the criteria they have ever been taught for every piece of writing means that we are treating every piece of writing *as a test*. It is only in test situations that we ask children to apply all their learnt skills. Imagine making every mathematics lesson a maths test! We know that children's maths progress would be very slow, as has been evident in children's writing. In maths we introduce one skill at a time, teach children to develop that skill, later make sure they apply it and, at regular intervals, test it. We need to do the same with writing, giving children feedback about the learning intention only, ignoring spellings and other features, unless that is the learning intention. On a regular basis we need to ask children to apply all they know about writing in a test essay. Many schools have extended writing lessons every week where children operate in these conditions. Literacy advisors have

pointed out that this is not a good idea, because it simply gives children time to practise more of their mistakes, so once every four weeks or half a term would seem more appropriate. In the meantime, we need to be focusing on specific aspects of writing in order to help children develop their skills.

Giving too much feedback at the end

Having given many criteria at the beginning of the task, we often then give children too much information through marking, which is overwhelming and difficult for children to take in. They are often demoralised by it, especially if there are many spelling errors pointed out when the child's writing was in fact very good.

One of the most important research findings is that grading every piece of work is counterproductive. This mainly applies to secondary schools of course, but there are parallels in primary schools. Grades freeze children into 'ego-related mode' rather than 'task-related mode'. Anyone who gets B or above is likely to feel complacent and anyone with B minus or below tends to feel demoralised. Grades beg instant comparisons with classmates, again leading to complacency or demoralisation. Children ignore marking *comments* when a grade or symbol is present, because that becomes the most important measure of their ability and achievement. Instead, research shows that children should be given information about where they achieved success against the learning intention and where they could improve against the learning intention – both at the same time. For instance, given a learning intention of using effective adjectives, we might say *'These are the three best adjectives you used and this one needs improving.'* Pointing out the success of the adjectives, then stating that the spelling could be improved, does not fit this formula. Every now and again children do need to know where their work lies in comparison with a standard – but not for every piece of work.

Although grades are rarely used in primary schools, stickers often are. These can act in the same way as a grade, distracting children from other feedback. External rewards are dealt with in detail in Chapter 8.

Distance marking

Distance marking – marking away from the children, because there is simply no alternative – takes up much of teachers' lives. Much of my specific research has focused on ways to make distance marking more manageable for teachers and more meaningful and accessible for children. Research about distance marking shows that children need to be able to *read* the teacher's comments and *understand* them. Understanding is often absent, and only the most confident and able children ask teachers to explain marking comments to them. Most children do not ask because they do not want to lose face by making the teacher think they do not understand what she has written.

Children also need to be given set lesson time to read marking comments, and then a short period of time to make a small, focused improvement based on the comments. Without the feedback information being used by the child, the improvement suggestion is unlikely to be carried over to future work in different contexts. For instance, writing *'You could say more about the prince'* will only be worthwhile if the child is then asked to use this prompt to write another sentence about the prince, thus improving the work against the learning intention.

Sadler (1989), in his paper about formative assessment, established three conditions for effective feedback to take place: the child must first know the **purpose** of the task, then how far they achieved this, and finally how to move closer towards the desired goal, or how to **'close the gap'** between what they have done and what they could do.

It is often the case that, instead of giving specific, concrete strategies to help children move from what they have achieved to what we want them to achieve, teachers instead simply reiterate the desired goal. For example, *'You need to give a better description here'* merely reiterates the learning goal of 'write a descriptive story opening'. Better advice would be that which focuses on how to improve the description (e.g. *'What was the prince wearing?'*, *'Could you describe just the prince's face?'*).

Time management is, of course, of prime concern in getting children to read then act on marking – but a personal anecdote perhaps emphasises the importance for learning:

I sing in a choir. Some time ago, we stumbled over two bars and the conductor stopped us and sang the two bars to us. We listened carefully. He then said 'OK? Everyone turn to page 167.' The next time we arrived at the passage we stumbled again. Our conductor was cross, accusing us of not listening and yet again sang it to us. It was not unusual for this to happen three or four times, with the same passage, before a concert.

What he should have done, of course, after singing it to us, was to have asked us to sing it back to him. He would have learnt two things from this: (a) whether we now knew the passage, and (b) if we hadn't, where we were going wrong. So why doesn't he do this? Because he feels that he doesn't have time. Every week he places an A4 sheet on his stand of all the numbers we need to get through. He then spends the entire evening looking between his list and the clock. His measure of success is that he has reached the end of his list. If he only had the courage to leave one or two numbers out, over time, we would know the piece better.

There are some powerful parallels here with lessons today, with teachers often feeling they are on a conveyor belt, aiming to cover the curriculum. If learning is our prime concern, then we cannot afford *not* to give children time to read and act on our feedback. It is one of the most significant aspects of learning. Some strategies for finding time and making this happen are given in the following pages.

A practical strategy for 'closing the gap' in marking

The research shows that we need to be giving feedback about the learning intention: indicating success and improvement needs. Marking can be more accessible for children if we introduce codes to show these elements, as follows:

1   **Highlight (with a highlighter pen) three places where the child has written the best aspects against the learning intention and indicate with an arrow/asterisk where some improvement can be made.**
In *Targeting Assessment in the Primary Classroom* (Clarke, 1998), this strategy was in its early stages. The initial findings were that children loved the highlights, but hated the arrows! Their reasons were that they did not know *how* to make the improvement.

2   The next stage of trialling was for the teacher to extend the arrow to the nearest white space and write a 'closing the gap' prompt for the child, to help them to close the gap and be able to make a small improvement.

This was the start of a great deal of interest by teachers, because now subsequent alterations made by children showed real improvement. The illustrations show examples of this strategy in action, with the child's subsequent improvement at the end. In Figure 4.1, the highlights indicate best persuasive language. The teacher has chosen to place the arrow at the beginning, asking the child to tell the magician why she is writing, a basic good start to a persuasive letter. Figure 4.4 shows the three best similes, in the teacher's opinion, and an arrow by the final line, with a 'closing the gap' prompt which focuses the child specifically on the way the cat is staring. The child's subsequent improvement makes a marked difference to the end of the poem.

Over time, it has been possible to categorise the different types of 'closing the gap' comments teachers have written, which has, in turn, given teachers more support in finding the right words with which to effectively 'close the gap' for each child.

'Closing the gap' prompt categories

A practical example helps to illustrate the different types of responses:

Learning Intention: To effectively introduce a character at the start of a story.

Activity: The children have to choose someone they know, who the class will not know, to describe.

We are learning to: *Write about people's characters effectively in our stories.*

How will we know we've done this? (created with the class): *We will have said something about their appearance, their likes and dislikes (including hobbies), their general personality, their attitude to others, anything else.*

Aside: *This is important because it helps the reader to really feel they know the person, rather than just knowing what they look like.*

After highlighting three success phrases (or perhaps just one for younger children), imagine the teacher has placed the arrow at the line written by the child: *'This person is a good friend.'* The following 'closing the gap' prompts are possible:

1   **A reminder prompt**
Most suitable for brighter children, this simply reminds the child of what could be improved:

> *Say more about how you feel about this person*

Interestingly, many teachers write this kind of prompt for all children. Most children need more support than a reminder prompt.

2   **A scaffolded prompt**
Most suitable for children who need more structure than a simple reminder, this prompt provides some support.

Can you describe how this person is 'a good friend'?	A question

or

Describe something that happened which showed you they were a good friend	A directive

or

He showed me he was a good friend when.......... (finish this sentence)	An unfinished sentence

3   **An example prompt**
Extremely successful with all children, but especially with average or below average children, this prompt gives the child a choice of actual words or phrases.

Choose one of these or your own:	*He is a good friend because he never says unkind things about me.*
	My friend is a friend because he is always nice to me.

Many children, given the example prompt, chose their own improvement instead. Perhaps we have been rather too concerned in the past with marking comments being open-ended and questioning. Giving a choice of actual words or phrases acts like the beginning of a brainstorm. Children invariably think of a better or different way of writing this themselves.

The examples of work on pages 62-4 show the strategy in action in a range of classes across the country. In all cases, the improvement took no more than five minutes, often less, which was amazing to the teachers. Children appear to be highly motivated by the personal element of the 'closing the gap' prompt and the helpful structure of the comment.

When we look at the focus of *contrasts and establishing a problem* in Fig. 4 6, the misspellings of *Birmingham* and *glistened* seem trivial by comparison, yet with traditional marking, *Bihrmingham* would have been the first thing picked up by a teacher.

These pieces speak for themselves and are, in places, breathtaking. The last three examples come from an inner-city school in Tower Hamlets, where the teacher had been using this marking strategy for six months. The children's development over time is, in part, a product of the marking. Without the chance to make an improvement on the same piece of work, we will never know what children are capable of. When one piece of work is followed by a new piece of work, we are not capitalising on their ability to develop. This strategy provides a single, specific focus, rather than a general instruction to redraft.

Making the strategy work effectively

1 Begin by telling the class that you will be changing the way you mark their writing because you realise this way will help them to progress. With older children you could even talk about the research about spelling and so on.

2 Introduce it to the whole class with a piece of work (from another class) on acetate with an overhead projector, demonstrating exactly what will happen.

3 At the beginning, go round the class, checking that they all understand what they should be doing. If they don't understand the 'closing the gap' prompt, it was the wrong one for them or they still need face-to-face marking. Remember, this strategy is designed for distance marking.
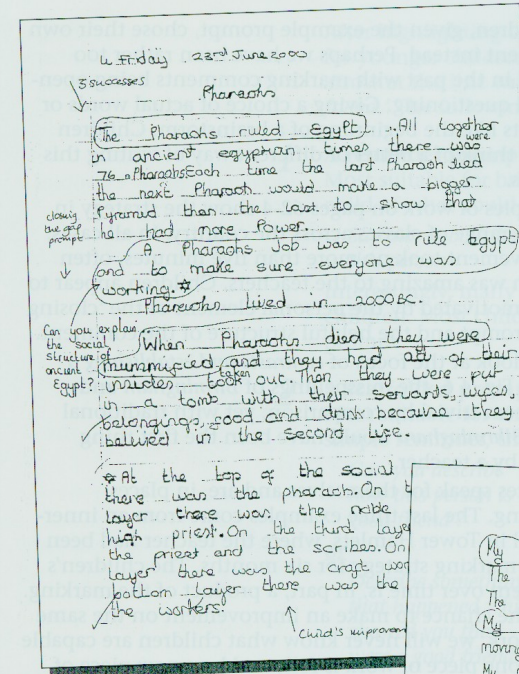
Fig. 4.3 Learning intention: To know what a pharaoh is and to understand their importance in Ancient Egypt
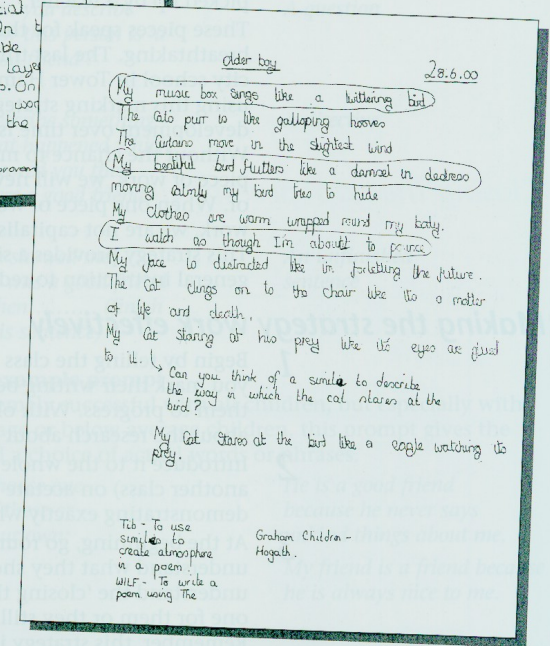

Fig. 4.4 Using similes to create atmosphere

Fig. 4.5 Learning intention: To establish a 'problem' and use contrasts

The wind howled viciously while the two children with eyes that glittered with anger, waited impatiently for the killer. Peter looked across the road and spore are turning warmly.

"You don't think he's backing out do you?" asked Peter. The clock struck 9.00pm.
"He is supposed to be here by now!" bellowed Lucy.
Something stirred and caught Peter's attention a dark figure's shadow skimmed across the cold, stone walls. Peter could hear his rythmatic footsteps......

Problem achieved

Mihhi if you are trying to contrast the two childrens personalities you need to make it obvious to the reader not just by what they say — so if h bellowed what will P do?

whispered nervously
asked fearfully.

would prefer apprehensively.
on't think he's backing out do you?" asked
apprehensively.

Learning Intention -: to write an opening paragraph which introduces the 'Problem' and uses contrasts.

circles are successes

It was a bitter night in Birmingham. The old, grey walls glistened in the moonlight. There was a blanket of frost covering the whole car park, it was as if the whole place was a crystal clear and Jenny had escaped from their beds to catch the culprit — Mr Fedding. Abruptly a blood curdling screech invaded the still quietness. Max spun around to see a huge bird, bigger than an eagle, bigger even than a full grown human being. It's dark shadowy figure came lumbering towards them, getting closer and closer. Before they knew it, the creature had snatched Jenny and sped off with her while Max watched in horror, speechless and motionless.

(closing the gap prompt)
Could you have inserted a contrast — bird = huge children = ?

This would have served to emphasise how big the bird was (big in size and power over the children) in comparison to the children.

↓ Child's improvement

Max spun around to see a huge bird, bigger than an eagle, dwarfing the delicate children, making them seem inadequate. [3 minutes]

Fig. 4.6 Learning intention: To write an opening paragraph which introduces a problem and uses contrasts

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learning Intention -:   3 successes

To draw concise conclusions reflecting the results.

Conclusion -: I found out that the harder you hit the drum the louder the sound and the softer you hit the drum the quieter the sound. I found out that the further the Newtons of force hitting the drum the louder the volume and the closer the Newtons of force hitting the drum the quieter the volume. I found out that the drum moved slightly which could have affected our results. I found out that to make a fair test you need to have the same person to hit the drum and the same person to hold the sound meter in the same place.

I found out that the only variable we can change is the volume force we hit the drum with as we are testing the effect of this variable only.

closing the gap prompt

Thomas although you have described the overall trend you need to consider whether all the results follow the pattern. Do they? Why do you think you may have got these results?

Child's improvement

learning Intention -:

To draw concise conclusions.

The final 2 results don't actually follow the pattern of a gradual overall increase. When I looked at the results of the trials I noticed that the results for trials 1,2,3 did not increase as much as they should. This might have been because when we moved the sound meter away from the drum we were changing more than 1 variable. Not only were we testing how the force we hit the drum affected the volume but also how distance can affect the volume.

(5 minutes)

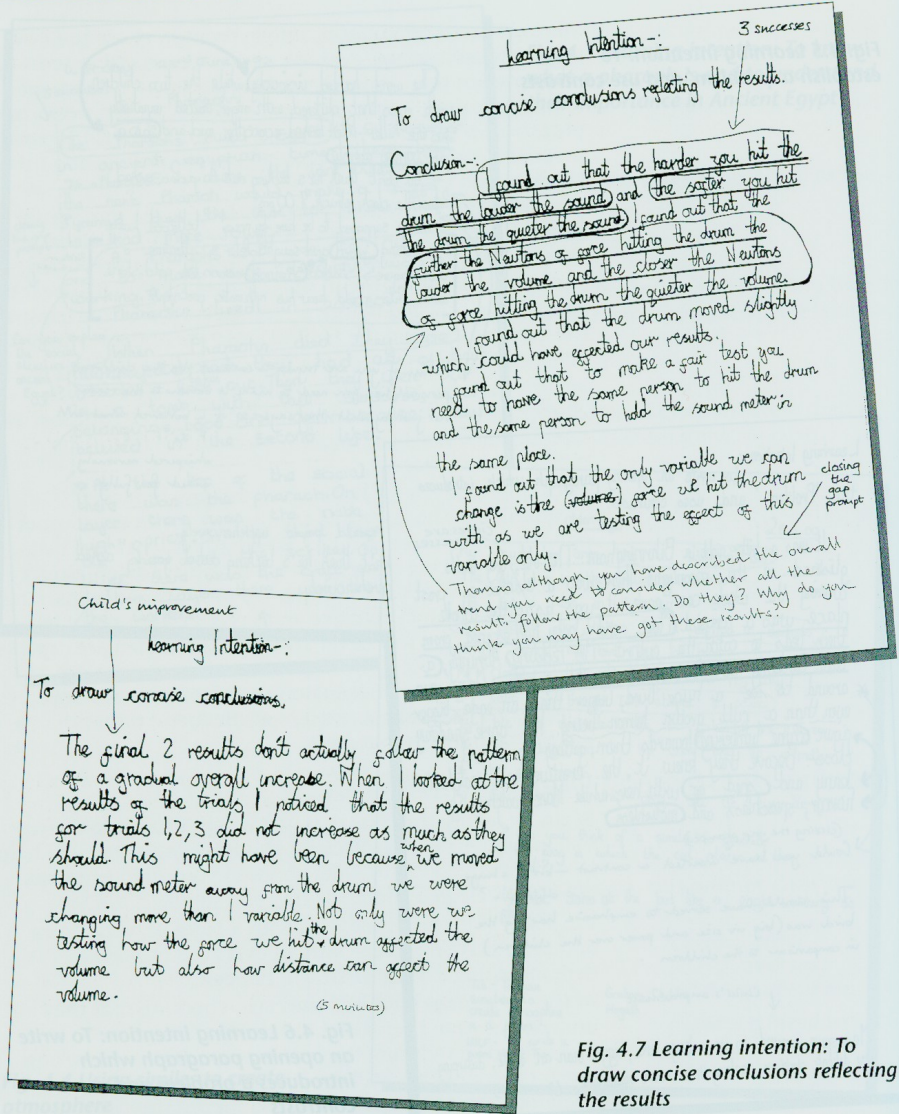**Fig. 4.7 Learning intention: To draw concise conclusions reflecting the results**

Fig. 4.7 Learning intention: To draw concise conclusions reflecting the results

4   Some children sometimes simply answer the question you write, rather than replacing the arrowed phrase (e.g. 'closing the gap' prompt: *Could you compare the price difference in a clearer way?* Child's improvement: *If Fairy was £2, mine would be £1.50*). To stop this happening, include the words *'Replace this phrase'* or similar, or simply explain to the child.

5   The teacher needs to read the work all the way through first, or the highlights can be ill-considered and/or there is a temptation to start correcting spellings! If it seems difficult to find three highlights, this is a cue for face-to-face discussion with the child. The work was probably either inappropriate for that child or not enough was generated in the time, or distance marking is inappropriate.

6   If the 'improvement' is not actually an improvement, the problem nearly always lies with the quality of the 'closing the gap' prompt.

Developing the strategy

Teachers using this strategy for even a short time (two weeks) have described a variety of spin-offs. The coded marking lends itself to self- and paired marking. Children start to guess which highlights the teacher would choose, presenting a clear opportunity for the child to choose their own highlights. Paired marking with this strategy produces high-quality dialogue, especially if the children work together on each other's work.

Teachers find themselves using this strategy when marking children's work face-to-face. The 'closing the gap' prompt might be oral with younger children, but the strategy is equally effective with face-to-face marking.

Teachers have found it useful in other subject areas whenever writing takes place, as was illustrated by the Science writing (Fig. 4.7).

With closed tasks, where there are right or wrong answers – such as in a comprehension or spelling exercise – there is no advantage or sense in using three highlights. Ticks and crosses are still appropriate. However, teachers have found that it can still be useful to use the arrow and a 'closing the gap' prompt for one of the mistakes.

Mathematics has been less successful with coded marking, because sometimes children get all the answers right. Clearly the coded marking would apply well to open-ended problem-solving, but with 'closed' tasks it is more limiting. When all the answers are right, some teachers have used an arrow and an 'extending the gap' prompt – an extension idea.

Finding time to do this

Firstly, you have to believe that this is a vital aspect of children's learning and development, in order to make the time. Teachers have mainly taken the first five to ten minutes in the morning or afternoon or the beginning of the Literacy Hour, before the children start today's lesson. With the latter, other parts of the Literacy lesson will need to be cut short. All Literacy Consultants I have spoken to have said how 'delighted' they would be to see this happening: the improvement time is, after all, reading and writing. On one day the text-level work might be shorter, on another the independent work, on another the plenary and so on, so that the same part is not curtailed each time. The closer to the lesson the work is returned, the better it is for the child, but teachers have found that children refocus relatively easily when they are reminded of the work. While most children are dealing with their improvement, there is an opportunity to speak to those children who need face-to-face intervention.

Whether this strategy is more or less demanding than current marking practice depends of course on the teacher's current practice. For many teachers it is less work, because they have been marking so many aspects, but for some it might mean more. However, the benefits make it worthwhile even if this is the case. Clearly, it would be unmanageable to mark *every* piece of writing in this way, so schools have tended to agree a minimum number to receive this kind of quality marking.

The impact of focused marking

The impact on children

■ Self-esteem increases as a result of children's more visible improvements.

■ Children like the system and are very motivated to make their improvement.

■ Children are eager to look at their marked work and enjoy looking back at previous comments.

■ In one class, every child came in before school to do their 'closing the gap' improvements and talk about them. The teacher said *'This is a miracle. They usually lurk in the toilets before school.'*

■ Children's writing improves, as well as the quality of their oral comments about their work.

■ More able children are able to suggest 'closing the gap' comments.

■ Children find it more useful than previous marking.

■ Children keep looking up at the success criteria when they know the work will be marked in this way.

■ Children make better connections between their work and the learning intention.

■ By focusing on one thing at a time, children improve their repertoire of skills.

The impact on teachers

■ Teachers who have applied the marking system consistently, say that it is one of the most useful of the formative assessment strategies in enabling the teacher to see tangible results of change and in providing evidence of improvement. Other common remarks are that marking is *'much less stressful'*, the strategy is *'liberating'* and the whole thing is *'exciting'*.

■ The quality of the child's improvement depends on the quality of the 'closing the gap' comment. As one teacher said, *'If you've hit that well, it works like a dream.'*

■ There is a clearer purpose in marking, so teachers feel more confident and satisfied about spending time on it.

■ The strategy again focuses the teacher on the learning intention of the task.

■ Looking for the three highlights challenges teachers' knowledge of the learning intention and can lead to learning intentions being broken down or made clearer in planning sheets.

Comments made by teachers include the following:

❝ *Creating the "closing the gap" comment is the hardest part – it makes you really feel like you're being a teacher, and you do gradually improve.* ❞

❝ *It has noticeably improved children's progress.* ❞

❝ *It was hard to ignore spellings after so many years of marking them every time.* ❞

❝ *It was much quicker to mark in this way, focusing only on the learning intention.* ❞

❝ *Brighter children are asking for more "closing the gap" comments.* ❞

Wider implications and effects

The marking strategy, as with all other formative assessment strategies, needs to be the subject of a whole-school focus, taking parents and governors with you over a set period of time. Parents, especially, need clear communication about marking, because they have certain expectations based on their own experiences of school. We need to tell them about the research findings and explain how spelling is actually learnt, and so on. The marking had been particularly useful for parents to see at open day, because the child's improvement and what is being learnt is clearly visible.

Of all the formative assessment strategies, focused marking is probably the most challenging for teachers, because it gets right to the heart of teaching. Children's response to the teacher's oral focus and marking focus inspires teachers to persist. The purpose of marking has, for many years, been clouded by the perception – and often the reality – of inspectors' and parents' expectations, but these teachers felt realigned to the real purpose of marking: to feed back to children about their successes and improvement needs against the learning intention – a real tool for learning and improvement. As with the other formative assessment strategies, teachers using this strategy feel that they cannot go back, that their practice is now fundamentally imbued with these processes.

A marking and feedback policy

The following draft policy was created by teachers on a number of 'Marking and Feedback' courses at the Institute of Education. It could serve as a starting point for developing your own school policy.

MARKING AND FEEDBACK POLICY

Mission Statement

We believe feedback and marking should provide constructive feedback to every child, focusing on success and improvement needs against learning intentions; enabling children to become reflective learners and helping them to close the gap between current and desired performance.

Principles

Marking and feedback should:

■ Be manageable for teachers.

■ Relate to learning intentions, which need to be shared with children.

■ Involve all adults working with children in the classroom.

■ Give children opportunities to become aware of and reflect on their learning needs.

■ Give recognition and appropriate praise for achievement.

■ Give clear strategies for improvement.

■ Allow specific time for children to read, reflect and respond to marking.

■ Involve children in the same process (whether oral or written), to ensure equity across subjects and abilities.

■ Take an ipsative approach (where attainment is based on that person's previous attainment) within the context of marking towards the learning intention.

■ Respond to individual learning needs, marking face-to-face with some and at a distance for others.

■ Inform future planning and individual target setting.

■ Be accessible to children.

■ Use consistent codes throughout the school.

■ Ultimately be seen by children as positive in improving their learning.

■ Encourage and teach children to self-mark wherever possible.

Strategies

Summative feedback/marking

This usually consists of ticks and crosses and is associated with closed tasks or exercises. Wherever possible, children should self-mark or the work should be marked as a class or in groups.

Formative feedback/marking

With oral feedback, in the course of a lesson, teachers' comments to children should focus firstly on issues about the learning intention and secondly, and in a whisper, on other features.

Quality marking

Not all pieces of work can be 'quality marked'. Teachers need to decide whether work will simply be acknowledged or given detailed attention.

Wherever the task is open or narrative, feedback should focus first and foremost on the learning intention of the task. The emphasis in marking should be on both success against the learning intention and improvement needs against the learning intention. Focused comment should help the child in 'closing the gap' between what they have achieved and what they could have achieved (e.g. *'What else could you say about the prince?'*, *'Say something about the prince's personality'*, *'Try one of these words: handsome, elegant, arrogant'*). With English narrative writing, codes can save time and make the feedback more accessible to the child: highlight three things (maybe two or even one per child with younger children) which are best against the learning intention and put an arrow where improvement against the learning intention could take place, including a 'closing the gap' comment. Where codes are inappropriate, success and improvement should be pointed out verbally or in written form. Useful 'closing the gap' comments are:

■ A **reminder** prompt (e.g. *'What else could you say here?'*).

■ A **scaffolded** prompt (e.g. *'What was the dog's tail doing?'*, *'The dog was angry so he…'*, *'Describe the expression on the dog's face'*).

■ An **example** prompt (e.g. *'Choose one of these or your own: He ran round in circles looking for the rabbit/The dog couldn't believe his eyes'*).

Secretarial features

Spelling, punctuation, grammar, etc., should not be asked for in every piece of narrative writing, because children cannot effectively focus on too many things in one space of time. When work is finished, ask children to check for things *they know are wrong in their work* when they read it through. They should not be told to correct all spellings, or they are likely to write further misspellings or waste time looking words up.

Only give children feedback about those things you have asked them to pay attention to. This will mean that some aspects of writing are unmarked, but over time will be marked.

Self-marking

Children should self-evaluate wherever possible. Children can identify their own three successes and look for improvement points. The plenary can then focus on this process as a way of analysing the learning.

Shared marking

Using one piece of work from a child in another class to mark as a class, using OHP, at regular intervals, models the marking process and teaches particular points at the same time.

Another strategy is to show two pieces of levelled work, with the same title, and discuss their differences.

Paired marking

Before ends of lessons, children should sometimes be asked to mark narrative work in pairs. The following points are important:

■ Paired marking should not be introduced until Key Stage 2, unless teachers feel younger children are ready for this.

■ Children need to be trained to do this, through modelling with the whole class, watching the paired marking in action.

■ Ground rules (e.g. listening, interruptions, confidentiality, etc.) should be decided, then put up as a poster.

■ Children should, alternately, point out what they like first, holding the highlighter pen, and then suggest ways to improve the piece, but only against the learning intention and not spellings, etc. The 3:1 success to improvement ratio should be followed, to avoid over-criticism.

■ Pairings need to be based on someone you trust – best decided by teacher.

■ Pairings should be ability based, of two middle, two brighter or one middle and one lower together.

■ Encourage a dialogue between children rather than taking turns to be the 'teacher': they should discuss each other's work together (e.g. *'I think this bit really shows how that character feels, what do you think?'*)

Organisation

■ The first 5–10 minutes of a lesson should, wherever possible, be used to get around the class to establish understanding and act on it where the work is too easy or too difficult.

■ Where possible, children should be encouraged to self-mark.

■ Set less work, especially in literacy and mathematics, so that time can be allowed to go through work and mark as a class.

■ Wherever class discussion takes place, feedback is given orally. Notes might also be necessary to inform future planning as a result of the discussion findings.

■ Children need to have some feedback about their work, but flexibility is important, depending on the nature of the task and the time available.

■ Distance marking should be accessible to children and manageable for teachers. Use codes against learning intentions wherever possible.

■ When work has been distance marked, time should be given for children to read and then make one focused improvement based on the improvement suggestion (linked with the arrow when codes are used). In order for the marking to be formative, the information must be used and acted on by the children.

Date agreed:

Date reviewed:

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