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“It is possible to eliminate unnecessary workload around marking, without having a negative effect on student attainment.”

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A preliminary study into the effectiveness of using a time efficient approach to feedback, compared to a traditional dialogic approach.

October 2016-March 2017

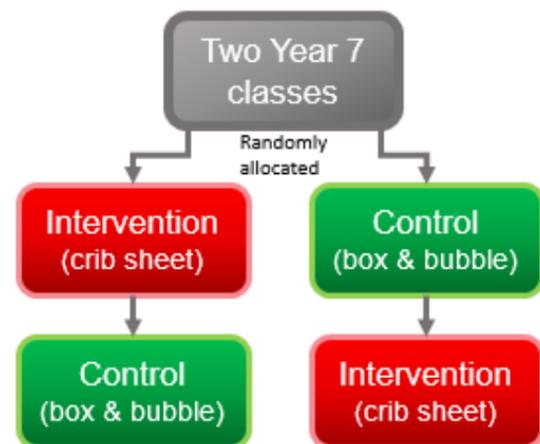
Purpose of the research: Dubai English Speaking College (DESC) is a fully inclusive, not-for-profit, British curriculum private school in Dubai. The subject of this study (marking and feedback) is currently very topical in schools. In March 2016, the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) published a review ‘A marked improvement’ into the available evidence on written marking’. They noted that the quality of existing evidence available in this area is very low and that there is an urgent need for more studies so that teachers have better information about the most effective feedback strategies. Marking has evolved into an unhelpful burden for teachers, when the time it takes is not repaid in positive impact on pupils’ progress. Providing written feedback on pupils’ work has become disproportionately valued by schools and has become unnecessarily burdensome for teachers. This seems to have arisen for several reasons, to include practice, which has misinterpreted and ultimately distorted the main messages of Assessment for Learning and the work of John Hattie. In addition, false assumptions about what is required by senior leaders and school inspection teams. This study intended to measure whether it is possible to eliminate unnecessary workload around marking and improve teacher wellbeing, without having a negative effect on student attainment.

The research design:

A within-subject design was used with a pre-and post-test. The independent variable ‘marking strategy’ was operationally defined by creating two counterbalanced conditions:

IV Level I – Control condition: Current practice ‘box and bubble’

IV Level II – Experimental Condition: No written feedback in exercise books, instead students received a pasted in crib sheet.



Methods:

Participants, sample size and randomisation:

There were 48 Year 7 students in the study, in two ‘mixed ability’ classes taught by the same teacher. Both experienced the control and experimental conditions. The class who experienced the experimental condition first were chosen by simple randomisation.

Procedures:

During the course of the study, the same English teacher taught students the same lessons and curriculum. The control group experienced the current mode of best practice for marking in the school, ‘box and bubble’. This meant that every 2-3 weeks the students had their exercise books marked by the teacher, who gave written feedback outlining strengths and areas for development. The teacher carried out this task for no longer than 2 hrs per class set. The experimental group received no written feedback in their exercise books, instead the teacher read their work and noted down general areas of strength and development on a crib sheet that students pasted into their exercise book. When students were reissued with their books, they were instructed to engage with their work and make corrections/redraft as per the school’s ‘green pen policy’. The teacher carried out the marking for no longer, than 45 minutes per class set.

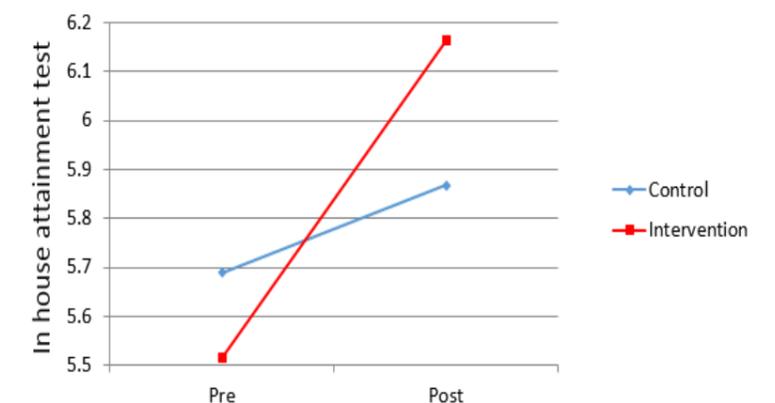
Materials

Pre and post attainment tests designed in-house, a crib sheet and a likert scale to measure student satisfaction with the new strategy.

Results:

Gain scores (calculated from pre- and post-test scores) were used in the analysis. A Wilcoxon signed rank test indicated a significant medium positive effect ($r= 0.273$, $p= 0.018$). The improvement in progress for the students who were exposed to the intervention (Mdn= 0.66) compared to the control (Mdn= 0.14). After completing both control and interventions, participants were asked to rate how impactful they thought the new approach had been on their learning, compared to the previous marking (with 1 indicating a ‘limited impact’ and 10 a ‘great impact’). All participants rated the intervention at 5 or higher with 85.4% ratings the intervention at 7 or 8.

Figure 1: Pre and Post test scores for the control and intervention



Limitations:

This is the first instance that a teacher has carried out a RCT in this particular area of study. Research was limited due to the sample size involved and it may have been affected by the choice of post-test material used to measure attainment, which was unstandardised. Further replication is necessary.

Conclusions and recommendations for future research: This research suggests that using an overall crib sheet for feedback leads to an increase in progress, when compared to box and bubble. It is likely that the increase in progress is linked to the amount of time students spent on improving their work after engaging with the overall ‘crib sheet’. Research from cognitive psychology suggests that making things more difficult in the short term leads to longer term retention and attainment (Bjork and Bjork, 2011). It is possible that this study has provided another example of this, as students are required to use metacognition and self-regulation strategies, to ‘think’ about their work. There is no evidence that increasing the amount of time a teacher spends marking books impacts positively on student progress. Further study is needed to ensure that the conclusions hold true over a larger sample size.