

**Gillingham Partnership
Formative Assessment Project
2000-2001**



FINAL REPORT

on the third term of the project and final
conclusions

Third term focus: Target setting

Shirley Clarke
Bet McCallum

Institute of Education, University of London

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Suggested “*FASTTRACK*” through this report

This report is the full version of the findings, including many quotations from teachers and children, examples of practice and analysis of the formative assessment strategies. Although the detail is illuminating, some teachers might find it less time consuming to follow the suggested route through the pages, to take in the pertinent points:

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PART ONE: Introduction to the project

The Formative Assessment Project began when the Gillingham Partnership (Gillingham Education Action Zone) invited Shirley Clarke to set up an evaluation project of formative assessment strategies in the Gillingham Partnership schools, based on the practical strategies she was continually developing with teachers (Clarke, 1998 and Clarke, 2001). The strategies are the dynamic culmination of continuing work with teachers on INSET courses and various research studies of these strategies in action, based on the wealth of sound research on formative assessment. The strategies are based, in particular, on the significant findings of Black and Wiliam (1998), which indicated that formative assessment raises children's attainment, increases their self esteem, gives them a greater stake in their learning and enables a greater prospect of 'life long learning'. Because the strategies are based on the practical experiences of primary teachers across the country, continual feedback leads to an ongoing developing understanding of what works well, what does not work as well and which conditions need to be in place to enable their successful implementation. They are not intended as 'the answer' to formative assessment or a 'quick fix' but rather a 'way in' for teachers to understand the principles of formative assessment. Over time the strategies develop and change to become the teacher's own, yet with key principles underpinning beliefs about achievement, ability and the role of the child in the learning process. Gillingham teachers are, through this project, adding a great deal to our knowledge about formative assessment.

The project was divided into four main sections:

Autumn Term 2000	Share learning intentions and success criteria and begin pupil self-evaluation
Spring term 2001	Focus oral and written feedback around learning intentions
Summer term 2001	Introduce writing/social targets with optimum pupil involvement
Autumn term 2001	Analysis and final report writing by Institute of Education staff Ways forward for Gillingham

Each of the first three terms began with INSET for every teacher led by Shirley Clarke. The various strategies were outlined, discussed and practised. Towards the end of each term, observations of lessons and interviews with children and teachers took place in every classroom from Reception to Year 6. Schools were encouraged to provide internal support such as holding interim staff meetings.

Steering committee meetings were held every half term, giving further opportunity for representatives of each school to report on progress and communicate concerns.

The prime aim of the Gillingham Project was to positively impact on teachers' teaching and children's learning. Because of this, the fieldwork and subsequent analysis has been written for teachers in the project, to feedback successes and difficulties, with suggestions of ways forward. Wider issues such as how the project was introduced to schools, the varying enthusiasm and readiness of the schools and teachers for the project, the level of support and leadership in the schools have been marginalised but are, nevertheless, included in this final report.

PART TWO: Introduction to the target setting strategies for Key Stages 1 and 2

1. The Intervention Strategies

a) Reception and Year 1

Teachers of Reception and Year 1 classes were encouraged to use social targets (e.g. taking turns) or early writing targets in their own ways, but were asked to avoid using individual targets which children would need to be able to read.

b) Year 2 to Year 6

Teachers of Y2 to Y6 were encouraged to use either group writing targets or individual writing targets.

The following implementation ideas were given:

Group targets

These were introduced according to the suggestions of the Literacy Strategy, originating from various school level analyses of test results. Having identified a particular weakness in writing, targets would be layered down from Key Stage targets, to class targets, to group targets within a class. The teacher then distorts the curriculum time to include more coverage of the targeted area, and less coverage of the areas identified as strengths. This would mean that specific teaching would ensue with different groups of children.

Individual targets

Teachers were advised that before Years 5 and 6, individual targets are usually difficult to manage, because children cannot easily take control of tracking their progress against the targets, nor in setting their next ones appropriately. This results in the teacher having to keep track of each child's progress against their target, providing appropriate tips for achieving it and suggesting a new target after its completion: a time consuming task. It was suggested that Years 5 and 6 could be asked to tally each time they considered their target to be achieved and be proactive in choosing their subsequent target.

Props

All teachers were given handouts of Sunderland LEA writing targets and Essex LEA writing targets, to use in their own ways if they found them helpful.

Other suggestions given

Based on feedback from other teachers, the following tips were given to make individual targets more manageable and achievable:

- Make the targets visible for the child, on a flap or card
- Quantify each target rather than leaving it at a general level (e.g. saying how many times or giving specific words or examples)
- Remind children to take account of their target when writing
- Give children a copy of the all the criteria for the level above their current level for writing, so that they can reflect on their strengths and weaknesses

2. Methodology

Three children were interviewed in each class, across a range of abilities, the total number of interviews being 419 representing above average, average and below average abilities (shown as AA, A and BA). Children's individual target cards were the focus for the interview, if they had them, or general questions about targets were asked. Target cards were photocopied and used in this analysis to contextualise the children's responses.

One hundred and sixty three teachers were interviewed on their use and experience of using their preferred system for target setting .Other teachers were not interviewed due to absence or being out of the school on other INSET etc.

Headlines

- All 15 schools had devised writing target systems
- Most teachers identified the tracking of individual targets for Year 2-4 as the most difficult organisation issue
- Year 5 and Year 6 teachers gave children control over tracking and setting their own targets and found this manageable
- Most children saw target setting as a way of improving writing
- Nearly all children could explain the target system
- Most children understood their current target and used it as a visual reminder when working
- The majority of children felt pride and satisfaction on achieving a target
- Most children could propose a future target which was specifically linked to a key element of writing
- Almost all children thought targets were a good idea
- Teachers found sharing learning intentions and success criteria with children the most useful and successful of all the strategies
- Teachers found pupil self-evaluation the most difficult of all the strategies
- Teachers and adults involved in working with children with SEN believed that formative assessment is appropriate for these children
- Teachers said that children's self-esteem had risen and they were no longer afraid of failure
- Teachers said that children were generally more focused and aware of their learning and most had achieved more
- Almost all teachers said they were now consistently teaching to learning intentions instead of activities

PART THREE: Analysis of the target setting strategies adopted by teachers

1. Overview

All 15 schools had devised target systems, although some had been in operation for a much longer time than others. Some schools had decided on a whole-school format, whereas others had left it up to year groups or individual teachers to decide on the system for their children. This allowed teachers of younger children to customise targets into more pictorial formats (e.g. writing a target in a speech bubble with a cartoon character; writing a target on a cut out animal shape). A few teachers were beginning to use group targets but the majority drew up individual targets (albeit individuals in the same class often had exactly the same target), despite contrary recommendations at INSET. A few teachers had quantified targets, asking to see specific improvements a certain number of times (e.g. *'Use alliteration once in your writing'*).

Many Year 6 teachers said that they had not been able to pursue target setting appropriately because of the dominating effect of SAT revision time.

2. Target systems

a) Group targets

A few teachers were using group and individual writing targets, simultaneously, but the vast majority were using individual target systems only. Of those teachers who were using group targets, most used the Key Stage 2 SAT results, Teacher Assessment levels and their beliefs about children's needs as the basis for constructing the targets. Some of these teachers said that they had discussed the group targets in year group teams.

Most teachers using group targets displayed these targets for children to see and organised the class into ability groups, with targets appropriately differentiated.

The use of group targets is, in fact, more focused around curriculum distortion than the tracking of individual targets over time. Once the weakness is identified, the target arrived at for children becomes a planning issue-how to spend more lesson time on the targeted aspect of writing and less on those elements identified as overall strengths.

Teachers commented that the group target is not always applicable to the ability of every child in a group, resulting in an unsatisfactory 'pitch in the middle'.

b) Individual writing targets

Teachers had devised individual target systems consisting of cards or flaps. The card or flap was 'owned' by each child.

The 'visibility' of cards varied. Target cards were sometimes loose (in the backs of Literacy books, in a separate box on the teacher's desk, in the child's own tray) and sometimes attached to books by sellotape or treasury tags so as to flap up. Where cards were deliberately kept loose, it was because teachers wanted children to apply their targets across the curriculum (i.e. in pieces of topic writing for science, history and so on as well as in pieces of purely 'creative' writing).

Cards varied in their visual appearance. The range included:

- sheets of ruled or unlined paper with lists of targets in the teacher's or child's handwriting
- bookmarks with one target
- tables generally headed with: 'Date set / Target / Date Achieved'.
- photocopies of the prompt sheets for direct highlighting of targets achieved

Sometimes teachers had avoided the term 'target' altogether. Two examples of this were: -

- a table headed: 'Date / 'I am trying to' / 'I've done it';
- a card with an opening statement:
'I have talked to my teacher about improving my writing by working on these things'
followed by two columns headed: 'My next steps are' / 'Can I do this now?'

c) Social targets

Teachers of Reception and Year 1 children were encouraged to use social targets, experimenting with their use.

A small minority of teachers had done this. Their main comments were as follows:

- It is feasible and useful to have individual (*who can button up their coat?*) and whole class social targets (*can we all sit still for 4 minutes?*)
- It can be more manageable to limit whole class targets to three at a time (*e.g. take turns, get resources ready, tidy away*)
- Using a wall chart to record individual success, as well as devices in which children colour in something when they have achieved their target, appears to have a motivating impact on children.
- The flexibility of approach and the opportunity to discuss targets is important for making target setting manageable with young children:

"I use Circle Time to set whole class targets. We have a specific topic we might be concentrating on, like, for instance, always remembering to put up your hand

when you ask/answer a question. Sometimes I write it down and it goes on our 'Golden Rules' board and sometimes we just talk about it. We identify the topic and discuss it at Circle Time and then at the next Circle Time we come back and discuss how well we've managed the target. It works well and doing it as part of Circle Time helps us to explore in more depth why we are doing these things." (Y1 teacher)

3. The manageability of individual target setting

a) Creating achievable targets

Sources of targets

Where teachers had used the target prompt sheets provided, they commented that these were a great help in providing quantified targets, although many teachers modified these prompts to suit the needs of the child.

The remaining teachers decided on writing targets for individuals as a result of the revealed needs of their writing or from discussion with each child.

Issues identified were:

- It is difficult to write targets that are both challenging and achievable
- Young children need smaller steps, so targets have to be broken down

Phrasing and tone of targets

Targets were phrased in different ways and wording often affected the tone. Some teachers varied the phrasing or tone of the targets while others stayed with one type. The range included:

- ***Target phrased as an instruction***

'Write in sentences'

'Use interesting vocabulary'

'Join handwriting'

Targets phrased in this way echoed the tone of the prompt lists supplied at the INSET day.

Sometimes teachers had expanded the instructions which were accompanied by examples, models or illustrations to explain what was meant, e.g.

'Form clear ascenders - 'b,d,f,t,l'

'Check to see if 'ands' can be replaced by since, although, as if, after, before, perhaps, unless, until'

This type of target spelled out something specific the child could do to gain success

- ***Target phrased as an affirmation***

'I am going to put a full stop at the end of each sentence'

'I will select vocabulary carefully to reflect the genre that I am writing'

Targets worded in the first person appeared as something the child vowed to do.

- **Target phrased as an achievement before the event**

'I can use paragraphs'

The wording used suggested the achievement.

- **Target phrased as a goal**

'To be able to spell cvc words'

Targets phrased like this appeared as something very specific to aim for.

- **Target phrased in terms of general improvement**

'To improve the quality of handwriting and presentation'

This type of target is broad and implies an overall end product.

- **Target phrased as learning**

'I am learning to use finger spaces'

The phrasing implies the target is part of an incremental process.

- **Target phrased as a learning strategy**

'To explore a thesaurus to find alternatives to the word said'

'Sound a word in my head and write down the letters / sounds I can hear'

'To think carefully about what I want to write and say the words slowly to myself as I write'

This type of target spelled out something specific the child could do to gain success.

- **Target phrased as an aide memoire**

'Remember to leave spaces between each word'

'Take care when using capitals'

'Think- is it clear who is speaking in your stories?'

The wording encouraged children to concentrate on something specific before starting writing.

- **Target phrased in terms of effort**

'To attempt to spell a high frequency word independently'

'To have a go at spellings, not worrying about mistakes'

'I will try harder to..'

Targets phrased in this way were softer than an instruction and implied that making the effort was important in learning

In summary, some targets were phrased in such a way as to make them more motivational, others gave explicit pointers in how to achieve success while the wording of others 'sugared the pill' slightly by being about just trying and having a go.

b) Tracking targets

One of the most significant organisational aspects of individual target setting is the teacher's ability to keep track of the progress of each child's target, as well as finding

time to decide the child's subsequent target. Clearly, the more involvement children can have in this process, the more manageable the system will be for the teacher.

Target systems varied in the degree of involvement of the child. Some cards were controlled by the teacher (who ticked or sometimes put stars or stickers beside a target achieved, or highlighted the prompt sheets). Others had spaces for children to keep track of their 'performance' on the targets. The amount of times a child had to 'prove' a target generally varied between 3-5 times. Older children commonly recorded their successes with a tick or a 'T' while younger children often drew a smiley face. In one case, children could, additionally, self-evaluate how they were doing on their targets by using a code for either 'excellent', 'good' or 'needs work'.

Where children had the prompt lists *as* target cards, they sometimes highlighted achievements themselves. In some classes children had the prompt list at their own level of writing in a wallet with their target card. When the targets written in the teacher's own words were achieved, the corresponding statement on the prompt list was highlighted. Children could then see what they were aiming for in the un-highlighted prompts. This was also the case in some older classes where children had the SAT criteria in a wallet with their target cards.

Most teachers identified the tracking of targets as the most difficult organisational feature, although making sure that each child's target is appropriately matched to his or her ability can be as problematic. Teachers of Y5 and Y6 children found these issues less troublesome, because children could tally how many times they had achieved their target and the teacher could check this as part of the marking process.

Of all the teachers who used individual targets, approximately half kept track of the target and took total responsibility for deciding the next target for each child. The remaining half either left the tracking to the child or 'agreed' the child's tracking of achievement. These teachers tended to negotiate the next target with the child, rather than giving the child total responsibility.

In general, the younger the child, the more likely it was that the teacher both set each target and tracked its progress.

4. Children's understanding of target setting

The large majority of children perceived target-setting as a strategy to help them improve, whether by reminding them of a recurring error or as a step by step ladder towards becoming literate. However there were some (usually infant) children who had no understanding of the system or the reasons for receiving targets and some could not read the targets. This was often the case when the targets were in the language of the literacy prompts and the children had had no involvement in setting or negotiating them.

Two important issues were raised by children in this round of interviews. Firstly, children identified a step that comes between receiving a target and trying to apply it – the process of translating it into what the target is asking them to do. Secondly,

some children reported (frankly) that they did not know how to go about achieving their target. This situation might have been avoided if targets had been of the type seen in some classrooms, where teachers had included with the targets, examples and models of success or strategies for the child to try.

a) Understanding the system

Children were asked at interview what all the information on their target cards meant and how the system worked. Only a very slim minority (18) could not explain the system and those were mostly infant children in classes where target-setting was very new. All the other children (401) gave detail about various aspects of the system. Some described their involvement in setting, negotiating or tracking targets:

'Miss set the target and she monitors it'

'Miss looked at our work and saw what we wasn't doing well, and so did I. We agreed about what to do'.

'We chose the one we thought was the most effective to help us with our writing'.

Some could explain the prompt list or reasoned where teachers got targets from (*'There's a teacher's book that says what targets you can give children'*). Many children wanted to talk about the number of times they had to 'prove' they could meet their targets and the symbols and codes used in the system, while others described how they were working on more than one target simultaneously or showed us targets already achieved.

When it came to what happened when targets had been achieved, most children described getting *'another one and another one'* until *'eventually you shouldn't need any!'* Others explained that they were given rewards when they reached their targets (*'You get a certificate in assembly and people clap'*). However, some children who were new to target setting and only on their first target were not sure what would happen after they achieved it.

b) Children's views of the purpose of target-setting

We asked children what they thought was the purpose of target setting - why they were using target cards. Overall, the majority of children saw a positive function of target setting as something intended to help them to learn about the elements of writing and to get better at writing. This attitude was reflected in 399 responses.

Many children (144) responded only generally to the question and their views on the purpose of target setting included: *'So children can learn to write'*; *'To improve the work we're doing'*; *'To do better and get more stuff right'*; *'To make you do the stuff to make stories better'*.

Other children gave more specific reasons for target-setting, as follows

- ***Targets were reminders from the teacher about areas for improvement***

One hundred and ninety one children (across the full range of age groups and abilities) were of the opinion that targets were reminders from the teacher about what they were not doing correctly. As one child expressed it: *'A reminder from the teacher*

telling you what you *DON'T* do that you *SHOULD* do.' Targets represented areas in need of improvement. By setting targets, the teacher was reminding them they needed to work on those areas. Hence, children saw targets as skills that had to be practised.

'It's to get us to realise that we're not doing something we should be doing and we've got to work towards that target' Y6BA

'So you know what things you have to practise on' Y4A

'Sometimes we don't actually do those things. We was maybe not leaving spaces or using large letters' Y1A

'Say you writ a really rubbish story- this is for what you missed out and how you could make it good. It's to learn about your mistakes.' Y5A

Children often referred to their current target and explained why they felt that one had been set:

'It's so I join up sentences' Y3BA

'I've got them targets because I wasn't putting spaces in' Y1 AA

'So you know about the b's and d's and you get them the right way round' Y1BA

'It's so I learn to do commas' Y4A

'It's to help me learn what to do right, e.g. where to put the apostrophe in contractions' Y6 BA

Children decided teachers **wrote down** the targets (and didn't just **say** them) because children often forgot to apply them. The targets were written down:

'So we remember we have to do them things right' YRAA

'So you can remember things and you do not keep on making the same mistakes over and over again' Y4AA

'To remember to write my 's' the right way round' YRAA

- ***There was a point to having one target at a time***

A small number of older children (7) reasoned that the point to having one target at a time was to isolate a particular skill that needed attention with time to try to master it:

'They are trying to get us to work on that one thing until we get it right'. Y5AA

'So you know what to target most. I needed to use more punctuation, so I have to target that' Y4BA

'It makes you see how you need to improve on a certain topic, instead of trying to work your way round it, you know just what to make better' Y5AA

- ***Targets were set to prepare you for the next stage***

Nineteen children thought that the overall purpose of achieving targets was so they would be prepared for the next stage in their school life:

'Because some of us haven't got neat writing and we need that for next year. We need loads of things for next year'. Y3A

'It's to get all your work right, so we don't get told off in secondary school' Y5A

'When you get into Grammar school you'll have improved your spellings by then – you wouldn't have to ask the new teachers'. Y5A

'It's to help us learn our work, and to help later on in life, in exams and that' Y5A

- ***Target-setting helps build up expertise step by step***

Several older children (14) saw an incremental purpose behind target setting: by building up and achieving the skills identified by different targets, the skills would become automatic and embedded, work overall would improve and standards would rise.

'You work up in steps to try to get your English better'. Y6A

'So that you can work on one specific thing so it comes naturally and then you get another target. So I will be good at writing and not need targets'. Y6AA

'It's so we can achieve the target and then carry on doing that thing in your writing. You get better at writing that way' Y4AA

'As you achieve them, it will help you do more interesting poems and stories' Y3BA

- ***Targets can be motivating***

Fifteen children saw targets as a motivational spur, expressing their opinions in terms of 'aiming' 'striving', 'trying for':

'They help you so that you can strive to get to that point and work to get to a higher level.' Y6AA

'So that you can aim for the targets and try to achieve them e.g. before my second target (keep your letters on the line) my letters were mis-shapen now they are getting better' Y5A

'If you want to become somebody who actually does good work, then you'll have lots of practice to become good' Y3AA

'So I can learn. If I've got a target I try to work to get the target. If I get something wrong I get a target so that I can get it right'. Y2AA

For 11 children, the list of targets achieved served as confirmation of what they could now do:

'So you can look back and check what you've done. If you have done well in your writing, you can look back and think in my head - Oh, I can do that.' Y4AA

'So you can keep a record of what you can do.' Y5AA

c) How children say they use targets

To find out how children were using the written targets, we focused on a discussion of the target that was currently set for each child. Nearly all the children understood the target and some showed the researchers examples in their books of where they had tried to meet the target or where the teacher had shown they had achieved it. (A tiny minority of children (7) explained that they weren't sure what their current target meant or could not read it.)

We asked children if they had a little plan about achieving their targets – how they would go about it.

For the majority of children (241) their plan (whatever the target) was to use the written target as a visual reminder of their goal.

Visibility of the targets was appreciated (*'Instead of just having it in our minds we can look at it every time on the card'; 'When you are working you need to look at something so you remember what to do'; 'It's easier to look at than a comment at the end of the teacher's marking. You'd have to keep looking back'.)*

There seemed to be two main ways of using the targets as reminders: the 'read-memorise-check' method and the 'continuous tracking' method.

In the first method, children reported referring to the target before and after writing, using the target as a prompt and then as a check, often challenging themselves to keep the target in mind while working:

'I get it stuck in my brain – memorise it then get on and do my work and see if I can do the target – then go back and check' Y5 BA

'I take it out, then I read through the target, then I work. When I'm finished, I read it out again and then I check it with my work' BA Y5

'Sometimes you hide it to see if you can remember' Y4 BA

Some children using this method said they made changes related to their targets when they checked their finished work:

'You write your normal story then go back and change things like 'nice' to beautiful'
Y4AA

'I read it, put the target card down beside me. After I've finished I have a look. If there are some spellings I've just guessed, I look at a word list and check'.

In the second method, children reported that they kept track and checked they were applying their targets while writing:

'I keep looking at my work and check on the card- it's sticking out while I'm working and I look back and forth' Y5A

'I work and look and work and look' Y3A

'I keep on looking at the target sheet and thinking about what I'm writing' Y6BA

'I watch it as I go' Y5A

'Look at it before I work and keep it in my head'/ think about it while I'm writing Just keep reading it.'

Some children seemed to be very systematic in this respect, for example, when one child had a target of using finger spaces, she explained that she checked after every sentence.

Four children reported that they had committed their current targets to memory and so did not need to refer to the cards.

Seventy one children reported that their plan was to achieve their target by 'trying hard' and this could involve thinking beforehand, visualising an outcome and concentrating while writing, keeping the target uppermost in their minds:

'Yes- a little plan in my brain says 'Think hard, concentrate on that target' Y6AA

'I think very hard and I do it in my book and try hard and think very hard' YRAA

'To say to myself-keep on remembering about this instead of playing' Y5 A

'You only need to do a picture in your head and you know what it looks like then'. Then you write about what you see in your head' Y1AA

Some older children gave specific examples in relation to their current target:

'When I'm writing stories, I think about it and try to fit a simile into it to make it more interesting. I keep it in my mind' Y5AA

'I'm looking for where I could write speech marks'

'I think about words with more than one syllable. I keep 'syllable' in my head, and keep the target out so I can look at it' Y4 A

Other plans (9) involved practising at home or getting inspiration from others or taking time and 'not rushing'.

An important issue reflected in the responses of a handful of children is that children may be able to read and understand the target but they then have to decide what it is they have to do: *'I have to look at the target first and try to work out how to do what is said on it', Y5AA; 'I look at my card and form it in my own language and then I'm able to do it' BAY5.*

A few children who could read their targets expressed that they didn't know how to achieve them, didn't know how to close the gap:

'I haven't got a plan. I don't really know how to remember about Capitals'. AA Y2

'I don't think I will be able to meet the target about handwriting. My writing is sometimes good, sometimes messy. I don't know how it can get better. I don't have a plan'. Y6A

The target itself does not necessarily show children how to meet it or 'close the gap'; as explained in the section above, only some teachers phrased targets in a way which suggested strategies children could use. However, 9 children did explain that, in striving to reach their targets, they planned to use mnemonics, memory jogs or strategies the teacher had taught them, for example, using a rhyme to remember a spelling, sounding out words, taking a breath to signify the end of a sentence, using a strip of card to ensure spaces between words, copying correct spellings as written by the teacher on the target card, keeping a dictionary or thesaurus on the desk.

Finally, 85 children did not describe a plan for achieving their targets. Those were dominantly (51) YR, Y1 and Y2 children who, despite sensitive rewording by the researcher, may have been phased by the question and may not have understood the concept of planning / aiming to achieve something (A few of the very young children could not read the targets and so the topic of having a plan was not pursued).

d) Achieving targets

We talked to children about how long it took to achieve targets.

Children explained that targets were achieved quickly:

- When they were 'too easy' in the first place
- When the class work gave them lots of opportunities to try their target (e.g. handwriting targets)
- When they put effort in and concentrated
- When they were already doing part of the target
- When they were given extra practice on their target by the teacher or when their teacher made their target a focus of lesson introductions

Children explained that targets took a long time to achieve when:

- Children didn't remember they had a target card
- Targets were too demanding (some had multiple items to be achieved; some involved going and finding a word bank or dictionary and looking things up during each piece of writing)
- Targets were hard (they involved things children knew they weren't good at)
- Class work did not always give them the opportunity to practise the target
- Targets involved something children didn't like doing
- Children kept forgetting to apply the target; it was difficult to think of the target AND compose the writing at the same time
- Children couldn't concentrate because the person next to them kept talking
- Children couldn't read the target
- Children worried about the target
- Children didn't really understand what they were meant to be trying to do (*'I didn't know which words to use to join up my sentences'; 'I'm not really sure where commas go'; 'I'm not sure where sentences end'; 'I can't spell words on my own'; 'Not sure what 'more detail' meant'*)

Many children made comments on how they felt when they were told they had achieved a target. Most commonly, children (220) explained that they were pleased with themselves, proud they had achieved it, glad they had been able to work out what was needed or happy they had 'proved' they could do it. Other feelings reported to a lesser degree were surprise at having managed to achieve it, relief that 'it was over and done with', apprehension about the next target, and a sense of 'getting cleverer' as the targets were 'crossed off'.

e) Children's suggestions for future targets

We asked children to think about their own progress and suggest their next target and 313 children had a stab at this. Although some (22) spoke in general terms, mentioning that their target was broadly to: 'do better stories' or 'make my writing more interesting', the majority of children (291) proposed targets which were more specific and plumped for one of the main components of writing such as:

- technical elements (spelling, punctuation, grammar)
- story structure (paragraphs, beginnings, middles, endings)
- parts of speech (adjectives, adverbs)
- style (variety of sentence structures, use of imagination, humour, poetic devices)
- or
- targets to do with handwriting and presentation (layout, style, size, legibility)

Others proposed:

behavioural targets such as *'work faster'*, *'stop talking'*, *'finish my work'*, *'check my mistakes'*, *'don't rub out'*

or

mindset targets such as *'must try to concentrate'*, *'keep to the point,'* *'make sure I understand the teacher before I start'*.

Four children explained that they would want to keep the same target they were currently working on because they felt they needed more practice.

When we asked children why they had suggested particular targets, their reasons included:

- it was the next thing on the prompt sheet
- it was something they wanted to get better at
- they were not very good at that particular thing
- they were not consistent (sometimes good something not so good at that thing)
- they always forgot those things
- they were not doing enough of that thing
- it was something the teacher kept reinforcing with the class
- their behaviour stopped them in some way from achieving

Ninety five children could not suggest a target for themselves (many saying that that decision would be up to the teacher). A few (7) suggested targets which were not concerned with writing but rather about ‘colouring in’, ‘maths’ or ‘reading’.

f) Children’s views about the worth and feasibility of targets

We described a scenario to children of a new child in the class who had not seen target cards and we asked: “Would you say target cards were a good idea or would you say ‘Target cards won’t work?’” In response to this, although 13 children were not sure one way or the other, most children (386) thought they were a good idea and simply reiterated the view that they ‘helped’ children improve or remember what they needed to practise.

Other children specified their reasons and thought they were a **good idea** because:

- they identified exactly what had to be improved
- they made children think about what they were good at and what not so good at
- they were like a self-help guide (*‘It’s a good idea. It helps you with what you have to do. It’s easier to look at it and see what you are doing than waiting with your hand up all the time’* Y5A)
- they are a record of your progress for you, the teacher and your mum

Children thought target cards would work because:

- the targets they had been given so far had been easy to achieve
- children liked concentrating on and solving a specific thing
- the fact that children were given targets meant that they had to try harder
- they stopped you making the same mistakes over and over again
- they *‘help you pace yourself and get higher gradually’* (Y5AA)
- *‘You don’t cheat and copy another person because we all have different targets’* (Y3A)

Twelve children believed that target cards were not particularly necessary. Some felt they were either able to do those things already or they would get there without cards or targets. For others, targets were hard and caused more effort. They would not work if children did not know how to go about achieving the target set:

'Some children get a spelling one and they don't really know how to correct their spellings' Y2AA;

'They don't work very well because some people can't read them' (Y2A).

A few children, sceptical about the impact of target cards, explained that they would only work if children were conscientious to track their own targets and get them checked by the teacher: *'They work for some people – others just forget. It has to be a person who wants to achieve something in their work' Y6A*

Finally, 8 children (all from YR or Y1) said they did not know the reason for targets and so could not give an opinion as to whether they would work.

5. The impact of target-setting on children's writing

Teachers were asked for their opinions about the impact so far of target setting on children's writing. Their comments need to be considered along with the fact that many had only started the system a few weeks before interview.

The following comments were most frequently made:

Key Stage One

- Children are more aware of what they are aiming for
- Children like to focus on one small thing
- It works well with some children, especially those of average and above average ability
- There has been improvement but it is difficult to know what has caused it
- It is too soon to judge

Key Stage Two

- Children can see what needs to improve and apply their improvements
- Children like the system
- It has had a positive effect on their attitude
 - 'They are more proud because they've been involved in their learning'*
 - 'They are more aware of the nature of their achievement'*
- Those who try hard have responded well
- The general quality of writing has improved as a result of targets
- Children now check their work more often
- There has been improvement but it is difficult to know what has caused it
- It is too soon to judge

6. Ways Forward for target-setting

It seems clear that individual writing targets for some children both motivate and give a clear focus for achievement. However, a number of factors need to be balanced when deciding whether to introduce individual targets wholesale.

Setting matched targets is the first hurdle, best done in conference with the child and with some kind of target prompts, as in the sheets given out on the INSET day. These often need to be broken down and quantified (specific examples and number needed spelled out).

Keeping track of the subsequent progress is probably the most difficult organisational feature and works best when children are encouraged to keep a tally of how many times they have achieved their target. Clearly, the clearer and better quantified the individual target, the easier it is for a child to recognise its achievement. Broad targets create problems in all quarters-the child and the teacher might be unclear about what constitutes achievement and therefore knowing how to make the improvement and then recognise it becomes an impossible task. Ideally, the wording of the target helps the child know how to achieve it, or the teacher will need to find a way to show the child how to progress. Where teachers have taken sole responsibility for tracking children's targets, it is often the case that a child might be left on a 'dead' target for weeks on end. When the momentum is lost, children lose motivation and teachers start to see the whole thing as a chore.

Ways in which teachers appear to have had the most success have been as follows:

- Investing a lot of time at the outset in negotiation with each child to explain and decide his or her first target-setting the scene for the whole focus.
- Making sure the target is crystal clear and matches the child's ability
- Getting children to tally each time they believed they had achieved their target
- Making flaps, cards or other devices visible and easy to handle
- Making sure the child knows how to go about meeting the target
- Making sure there will be opportunities for the child to cover and therefore achieve the target, or, at least, saying when it is unnecessary to refer to the target. Some teachers chose a target from the blocked unit of work in Literacy each time, providing children with a sheet of what was to be covered, then encouraging them not only to choose a target for the coverage time, but asking them to regularly reflect and review progress on all the criteria. This more focused but at the same time more relaxed approach was one of the most successful strategies we saw-tying the target setting into general self-evaluation and specific coverage. Again, however, it only worked well with Year 5 and 6 who could take on such responsibility and analyse the criteria effectively.

- Only giving individual targets to certain children, based on the needs of their writing.

PART FOUR: Development of the previous elements of formative assessment introduced during the year

As the third term of the project marked the final interviews with teachers, questions were asked about how the previous formative assessment strategies had been developing in both implementation and impact.

1. Sharing learning intentions and developing success criteria for lessons

Teachers, in general, had found sharing learning intentions and developing success criteria the most useful and successful of all the strategies. Nearly all had slightly adapted the initial suggestions to meet their individual needs and the needs of their children, such as focusing on the language of ‘We are learning to’ instead of the acronym ‘WALT’, streamlining the writing up for children to see and maybe removing the characters, if they had them. There was clear awareness of teachers’ developing expertise, such as being able to link activities more specifically to learning intentions.

“They now look to see what they’re going to be learning on the board before every lesson. LSAs are tuned in too. There are still some unswitched on kids who don’t use it. It’s had a big impact on my planning.” (Y5T)

“I have made it more child-owned. I don’t use WALT much now. I have a class photograph on the wall saying ‘We are learning to..’. We read it together and the children remember to ask if I forget. I more carefully phrase success criteria and link more carefully, to the learning intention. (Y2T)

“I use WALT and WILF all the time now-the children respond better. I find it useful. There are no negative aspects. It’s good for my planning and we all know what’s going on.” (Y6T)

“They’re very used to it. They want to know ‘What’s the WALT?’ every time. They simply expect it as part of the lesson.” (Y4T)

2. Pupil self-evaluation

Teachers found this the hardest aspect of formative assessment and a small minority of teachers had stopped doing it, especially those with younger children. Nevertheless, there was still a great deal of self-evaluation taking place. Many teachers said that the self-evaluation, in general, and the use of starting point questions had become more informal. Only certain lessons were generally targeted for self-evaluation. Some Year 5 and Year 6 teachers said that the language and spirit of self evaluation had become part of the process of working through an activity, with the questions asked as children were going along (by teachers and children alike), rather than only at the end.

This was seen to have had a positive impact on children's ability to take control over their learning, enabling them to be continually reflective and analytical.

"I don't refer to the poster as I used to-I just use the different questions more naturally. Eagerness has developed in the children. Before some would say 'I am always brilliant'. Now their perception that able children do not find anything difficult has changed. Children now expect to say what they found difficult." (Y5T)

"I find the questions a useful structure on my daily planner. It's also useful for supply teachers. It helps celebrate good learning. They do sometimes come up with things not to do with the learning intention but it's still useful (e.g. I found it useful to work with a partner). They still sometimes say I found it easy." (Y6T)

"Children give presentations and the class is encouraged to critique-say what they found good about the work and what could have been improved. I think this kind of thing prompts the children who are presenting to self-evaluate." (Y6T)

"I am only using it during Literacy and Numeracy. It's largely because of the limitations of time, although I have noticed that the children will often self-evaluate together when chatting at their tables. I often overhear them saying, and it is only the bright ones, 'Oh, that was a bit tricky' and then talk about why they found it tricky." (Y2T)

"I'm very confident about this. It's a bit more focused than it was. I get only one group to self-evaluate at a time. The questions are now automatic. Children often say they're stuck, very confidently. Someone else often says 'If you did this....' They help each other." (Y2T)

3. Focused feedback against learning intentions

Teachers were asked if there had been any further developments with giving oral feedback against learning intentions or marking giving feedback about successes and improvement suggestions. A third of the teachers said they had made no changes and a small minority of 11 teachers said they had not used the strategy since last term.

A third of teachers said they were indicating successes orally with children as a new departure.

Teachers made many more positive than negative comments about their work on feedback. The following points derived from interview responses show the range of positive effects of focusing feedback on the learning intention:

- Children's written and oral responses are very positive
- Teachers would like to have time to do it more often
- Children's writing has improved
- It makes the teacher focus on the right things
- Children like to mark their work in pairs focusing on success and improvement
- Many teachers want to plan for this in September

Fewer negative responses were made, but the following indicates the range of concerns:

- SATs got in the way
- It is difficult to give feedback when children are organised in sets
- Teachers found it hard to do distance marking in Y2, because too many children need help reading the improvement suggestion although the highlighting works and having only a group at a time makes it manageable
- Even given orally, it needs more time to get younger children to make improvements on their work

“When children are writing stories, I use closing the gap on the spot, with AA and A children. Once a week, I give the children an extended piece of work and I write their feedback and prompt, read what I have written to them and get them to act on it. The AA children have responded and improved. Their responses have become more detailed and extended.” (Y1T)

“We are using the marking strategy to help them make ‘bigger’ improvements (i.e. instead of just giving a prompt to improve one little bit, we are writing comments which help them redraft whole paragraphs-more about the craft of writing. Of course making the improvement takes longer. But children are getting better at thinking about the structure of their work.” (Y5T)

“I find the less able tell me lots they could say but don’t always have the skills to write all that when they make the written improvements.” (Y4T)

“I’ve shortened it. I was trying to do too much. Now I’m writing less and it’s more learning intention specific. I couldn’t say how effective it’s been, but it’s demanding of time and thought, though it also frees up time if you get it right.” (Y5T)

“I give oral feedback to my children (e.g. when the children were writing about a visit to the farm with one child who wrote a list I said ‘Not just a list-say 3 things about the farm you liked’ and she wrote three sentences.” (YRT)

PART FIVE: Overall impact of the project, taking account of significant factors

1. Significant Factors

a) Conscriptio

The decision to involve all teachers in the project was made by the headteachers and the Project Director, based on the premise that there would be greater impact if all were involved. Within the heads' group, two to three preferred the idea of an INSET only model, without the rigorous research element. Although the heads were urged to inform their staff carefully and enthusiastically of their involvement in the project, we know that their introduction to it was very varied. The first round of teacher interviews revealed that some teachers felt reluctantly obliged to be involved in 'yet another initiative' and in some schools, the heads themselves were clearly openly unenthusiastic about the project. In fact, in certain schools, the staff was actively encouraged not to try out some of the strategies, sometimes against their own wishes. This negative element in some quarters was evident at the first day's INSET, where the mood was sometimes that of the launch of a government initiative, rather than a teacher based action research project. Interestingly, each INSET day became more optimistic in mood, as teachers began to see the positive results in their classrooms.

b) Uniformity

As a 'way in' to formative assessment, teachers were given practical strategies to try in their classrooms. There was a continual emphasis on the importance of teachers and schools being flexible, adapting the suggestions to suit their needs, and using their own ideas as well. However, in some schools, the heads, through concern over consistency, insisted that all teachers use identical approaches, language and visual aids. Interviews again revealed that many teachers, while enthusiastic about the underlying principles involved, felt constrained by the insistence on a particular straitjacket, so tended to pay lip service to formative assessment. It seems likely that no amount of persuasion would have daunted some heads, because the current OFSTED climate pressurises schools into consistency and uniformity wherever possible.

c) Pre and post testing

In order to make the project as rigorous as possible, the heads group decided to opt for pre and post testing with the involvement of a control group. Hodder and Stoughton Reading and Numeracy tests were issued and administered by the teachers in the first two weeks of the autumn term. This set the project off in a negative way, because teachers resented having to ask their children to experience the tests, which were unfamiliar in format compared to the statutory SATs. There was also irritation about

the workload involved in marking the tests. As a result of this, funding was later made available so that all tests could be externally marked at the post-testing stage.

d) Teachers' beliefs about learning

As Black and Wiliam (1998) pointed out, formative assessment sits easily with a constructivist belief of learning and a concern that all can succeed. Where the teacher adheres to delivery and coverage as the key focus for helping children learn, formative assessment will be seen as 'another thing to do' which gets in the way.

Our observations and interviews revealed considerable differences between teachers in this respect. It was especially evident amongst Reception class teachers, who were almost equally divided between those who thought their children were far too young to be involved in any of the strategies and those who positively introduced formative assessment with successful outcomes. Where teachers' prime concern was children's learning rather than coverage, the strategies were seen to have had a positive impact on children's achievement, attitude to learning and the teacher's teaching.

It is vital that these factors are taken into account when interpreting the data collected and reading the findings outlined in the three reports for this project. Considering the negative aspects, we feel gratified that the power of formative assessment, over time, convinced most of the reluctant teachers and heads that there were worthwhile gains to be had. The detail of the three reports illustrates the continual enthusiasm of all the children and the growing enthusiasm of the teachers. It should not be understated that, from the outset, many heads and teachers were extremely positive and enthusiastic. A great many children and teachers reported significant development, in increased teacher expertise, greater pupil achievement, raised self esteem, the creation of a 'learning culture' and the emergence of children as 'life-long learners.'

2. Impact of the whole project

a) The use of formative assessment strategies among support staff working with children with SEN

A special study was conducted to review the use of formative assessment amongst support staff working with children with special educational needs.

Introduction

After the first INSET session with all the Gillingham heads and teachers, a telephone interview of heads was conducted in which Heads were asked about cascading the INSET to their staff and whether they had discussed the use of the strategies with the support staff. Ten heads reported that they had explained the strategies to support staff.

When the project began in earnest, support staff were not included in the main data collection from class teachers between September 2000 and July 2001. Our experience in schools during that time was that support staff working with children with SENs often approached us in an ad hoc way to talk about the strategies. It was therefore decided to include the views of a sample of support staff in the data collection.

The sample was drawn from schools where the head had cascaded the strategies to the support staff, either directly, or through the senior management team. Not all ten schools were willing to take part and the sample used came from 8 willing schools. Data was collected equally through telephone and face-to-face interviews during the months of June and July. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes.

This report adds to the classteachers' data, the practices and views of 10 (ten) Special Educational Needs (SEN) personnel in schools. The interviewees comprised: 6 LSAs (Learning Support Assistants) 2 SENCOs and 2 Special Needs Teachers.

Interviewees were asked about the children with whom they work. Those children displayed a variety of special needs including Physical Disability, Cerebral Palsy, EDB, Autism, ADHD and language skills development.

They were also asked about each of the formative assessment strategies in turn - their implementation and impact. The following sections report the views of support staff on each strategy.

Sharing learning intentions

As part of formative assessment, the sharing of learning intentions enables the child to know the purpose of the activity. Among all ten (10) interviewees, the learning intention was shared either through the use of the acronym TIB ('This is because') or WALT ('We are learning to.'), depending on the devices used by each school, or through oral or written means.

Implementation

Nine of the ten personnel interviewed explained that they were actively involved in sharing learning intentions with the pupils they teach. The remaining LSA did not share learning intentions because she believed that *"the children are not bothered about the learning intention"*.

The majority of interviewees (7) used the acronym TIB or WALT according to the approach taken by the particular school. In most cases the class teacher introduced the learning intention to the class as a whole. This meant that the role of the LSA (Learning Support Assistant) in sharing learning intentions was simply to either explain it again to the child/children by re-emphasising TIB/WALT before moving on to the task, or to have the children start on the task reminding them of TIB/WALT as they worked.

In one Infant school the Special Needs Teacher introduced the learning intention through soft toys representing TIB/WALT. The children were told:

"TIB wants us to learn ..."

The interviewee gave an example from an art lesson of how she would express the learning intention using the toy:

"TIB wants us to keep all the paint on the paper."

An LSA in another school had started by using little pictures of TIB/WALT in small groups throughout the school. For each group WALT showed the learning intention in written language appropriate to the age and level of ability of the children within the group. Later this LSA stopped using the pictures as an outcome of the INSET feedback, which advised 'playing down' the characters.

Another LSA in an Infant School stated that she always writes the learning intention even for children who can't read. She explained that she only uses few words (4/5 words approximately) and for those who are unable to read, she keeps telling them and reminding them of the learning intention.

Three (3) interviewees said that they placed no specific focus on TIB/WALT. One LSA gave the following example of how she shares learning intentions with the children she teaches:

"Today we are going to do some reading and when you read I want you to use your word building skills."

She explained she had to do it this way as she was only involved in specific teaching (focusing on one task only) rather than in the teaching of the whole lesson.

Another LSA who worked regularly with some children on relaxation exercises reported that she regularly explained to the children why they were doing the particular exercises.

Impact

Seven out of ten support staff who were interviewed felt that children with SENs are able to understand the learning intention. They also felt that knowing what the learning intention was made a difference to the children's performance on the tasks/activities.

One LSA found that children's understanding was enhanced, especially among boys, when the ASIDE (the big picture - relating to everyday life) was given alongside the learning intention.

Of the other three, one LSA was of the opinion that the sharing of learning intention is such a lengthy process that valuable lesson time is lost. As she expressed it,

"Time would be better spent on focused learning activities".

Another felt that the children with whom she worked already have great difficulty in performing the task. She felt that sharing learning intentions just adds to the difficulty and, in some cases, cause frustration as too much is reliant on memory (that is, remembering the task instructions as well as the learning intention).

The third found that she had to adapt the language too often: *"I have to tell it to the children in words they can understand."*

The majority of interviewees (8) found that verbalising the learning intention helped the adult to keep focused on why the children were doing the particular task/activity. As two explained,

"It keeps my teaching focused on the plan of the lesson."

"I find it easier to explain to the children. They seem to grasp it. It is like a self-reminder for what I need to focus on."

One also found that it made life easier for both LSA and children. As she explained,

"Children are not always engaged in all that is going on in the lesson...but knowing the LI has given them grip on what they are learning in the lesson."

Sharing success criteria

To encourage children to take responsibility for their learning, it is important to explain and, at best, to generate with children the success criteria for the task in hand. In this particular project the success criteria was introduced to children using the acronym WILF (What I'm Looking For).

Implementation

One SEN teacher and one SENCO interviewed reported that they did not directly communicate success criteria to children, far less get children to generate the success criteria. All six (6) LSAs reported that mainly the class teacher did sharing of success criteria. They had no involvement in creating or getting children to create the success criteria. LSAs worked only for short bursts of time with children (around 20 minutes) before the class regrouped, they felt pressured into talking about what children needed to do to complete the task and so avoided spending time on sharing success criteria.

The special needs teacher, using the soft toys approach, emphasised the eyes of the toy called WILF (What I'm Looking For). She specified to the children what she would be observing in their work: *"I say - 'WILF has very good eyes, so let's see what WILF will be looking for in our work'"*.

The general feeling was that SEN children are not able to suggest what the teacher would look for in their work as the following quotes imply:

"I tried it once and all I got back was a variation of WALT. SEN children found it quite difficult."

"For SEN children in the infant school, this might never happen. They'll always need teacher direction."

Two personnel (one SENCO and one SEN teacher) contradicted the above views by emphasising the capability of some children with SENs to suggest the success criteria.

Impact

The two members of staff who did invite children to suggest the success criteria believed that children gained from it:

"Children can tell you that it is 'capital letters and full stop, for example, that you will be looking for. If it is coming from them they are far more switched on."

"I think it helps if they try. They don't always get it but they pick up from what you're saying, what is expected of them."

Despite the view that there may not be time in short sessions to share learning intentions and success criteria, interviewees felt that knowing the success criteria (WILF), from the teacher, has an overall positive effect on children's learning.

"It gives them (the children) a bit more power in their work."

"It helps them (the children) to focus on what they could achieve."

Summary

The majority of interviewees (8) felt that there are some benefits in sharing learning intentions and success criteria with children with SENs in their focused groups. However their main concern was, because children with SENs took a longer time to understand what is told to them, the time spent on explaining learning intentions and success criteria took precious time away from helping the children to develop concepts and skills.

More SEN personnel felt comfortable with TIB/WALT than with WILF. The vast majority of them were actively involved in sharing learning intentions, while only very few were involved in developing success criteria, although many saw the benefits in it.

Pupil self-evaluation

Self-evaluation is a significant aspect of formative assessment. It involves children in understanding the criteria through which their work will be assessed and in making judgements about their own work against the criteria, and understanding the implications for improving their work.

Interviewees were asked about their involvement in pupils' self-evaluation sessions and whether children with SENs were able to see what is good or not so good about their work.

Implementation

Six out of the ten people interviewed had no involvement in this aspect of the lesson. After activities had been completed, children rejoined their class group for a plenary session, in which self-evaluations may take place.

Those involved in pupil self-evaluation (4) found it was not always necessary to use the poster of questions suggested at INSET. One LSA thought that it was more effective to use two questions. She prioritised the questions *'What did you find easy?'* and *'What did you find difficult?'* This she found to be stimulating questions for children in her group. Children were able to say what they found difficult about the task and some even told how they moved out of the difficulty.

In dealing with very young children with learning, behaviour and physical difficulties, one special needs teacher rephrased the questions as follows:

"How much help did you need to complete the work?"

"Did you do this work all by yourself?"

"Could you have done it by yourself?"

This she found work quite well with children in the infant classes. It was one way of getting each child to say something about his or her work.

One LSA devised her own line of questioning:

"What do you think of this bit?"

"What's wrong with this bit?"

"What have you learned?"

For this LSA, this line of questioning, used on a one-to-one basis, was effective in getting children to reflect on the relevant aspects of the task and their learning.

Impact

Only three interviewees believed that the children they worked with were able to self-evaluate. These were junior children who were able to say what they were happy about in their work and where they went wrong in their work.

All interviewees agreed that, self-evaluation is as important for SEN children as for other children, but needed more work:

"If they (the children) lack the confidence and vocabulary, self-evaluation will have to come with lots of group discussions depending on the needs of individual within the group."

Summary

Six interviewees were not involved in pupil self-evaluation. Of the four who did get involved, only three actually thought that children with SENs were able to self-evaluate successfully. However, it was the general view that pupil self-evaluation is a valuable exercise for all children.

Oral feedback and focused marking against learning intentions

Oral feedback

Making children aware of the extent to which they have actually met the success criteria is an essential part of formative assessment. During the course of the interview, SEN personnel were asked whether it was easy to stick to the learning intention and success criteria when giving oral feedback to children.

Half of the sample (5) found it easy to stick to the learning intention and success criteria when giving feedback. The other half found it difficult. One LSA reported:

"Sometimes you deviate. It is difficult to stick to such a narrow focus. I have to make myself do that."

Another added,

"You have to be quite strong - you have to remind yourself and avoid slipping into old habits."

Most SEN teachers/LSAs (9) were able to adopt similar approaches to teachers in mainstream classes when giving oral feedback. However they did find difficulty phrasing the feedback.

Strategies commonly used were;

- Scaffold prompts
- Example prompts
- Reminder prompts
- 'Own strategies', such as simple questions to prompt children to check what they have written.

Impact

Of those interviewees who gave oral feedback to the children in their group, the general response was that they (the SEN personnel) were able to speak to children about what they managed to do well. They found that quite easy to do. Handwriting was singled out as a good example:

"It works well in a few subjects, like handwriting. It is easier for children to see the need for improvement there."

However, the difficulty arose with children's attitudes when they had to give children an improvement point, as the following example shows:

"This is an area (doing improvements) that children still find difficult. They resent having to do over things they have already done."

According to the SENCO, who adopted her 'own strategies', such as simple questions to prompt children to check what they have written the result showed great improvement in writing in a short space of time. Another SENCO assigned the good results gained by Y2 SEN children to the formative assessment strategies in this project and in particular to consistent oral feedback.

Focused marking against the learning intention

Only three interviewees were involved in distance marking. The others felt that children with SENs are not ready for this type of marking.

Summary

Nine interviewees were keen on giving oral feedback related to the learning intention and found this to be very effective. Distance marking was only carried out by three of the ten interviewees. The more popular view was that children with SENs were not ready for this type of marking.

Target setting

Generally it is the class teacher who sets targets, so when children go to their SEN groups they have already had their individual targets. Only three personnel interviewed had involvement in setting targets for children (two SENCOs and one SEN teacher) and this mainly linked to writing IEPs (although in four cases the class teacher also wrote the IEPs). The general feeling among SEN personnel was that there is no real difference between individual targets and IEP targets, except perhaps that IEPs tended to span a longer period and tended to be more behavioural, such as *"Sit still in a group for 5 minutes."*

As a result of using some of the formative assessment strategies, all interviewees felt that IEPs should now be more ongoing. In planning IEPs they should look for gaps in children's learning and make it apparent to the children, so the target becomes more relevant to improvement.

Conclusion

All interviewees were in favour of the formative assessment strategies being used with children with SENs. However, some felt that not all the strategies were useful if taken too literally for the children they teach. Sharing learning intentions was viewed by 9 out of the 10 interviewed to be very relevant and needed for children with SENs.

Oral feedback to the learning intention was implemented by almost all the interviewees and had improved children's work in some cases.

The level of involvement of SEN personnel in implementing the formative assessment strategies varied according to classroom management strategies and the roles they were expected to play by classteachers. For example, LSAs had little involvement in sharing success criteria, pupil self-evaluation and in marking. However, those who were able to implement sharing success criteria found it quite useful and were able to adapt it to include very young children in the infants. Most of those who tried pupil self evaluation found that it enabled children to reflect on their work.

In general the feeling was that although the model of formative assessment was taken on board, some future work was needed in developing the strategies in particular ways in order to make them as effective as possible with children with SENs.

b) Overall impact of the project on children's self-esteem, learning and achievement and the impact on teaching

Finally, teachers were asked to look back at the impact of the whole project in term of the following areas: the impact on children's self-esteem, the impact on learning and achievement and the impact on their teaching.

The impact on self-esteem

Key Stage One

A very small minority of teachers said they could not say whether children's self esteem had improved, but all remaining teacher said that children's self-esteem had risen as a result of the project. Key points were:

- Children are now able to confidently tackle new things
- Children are no longer scared to be wrong
- Children are now more involved in their own learning

Key Stage Two

A very small minority of teachers said that they either could not tell if children's self esteem had risen or believed it had not. All remaining teachers said that children's self-esteem had indeed risen over the year as a result of the strategies. Key points were:

- The rise in self-esteem had been noticeable
- All children feel they have something to be proud of
- Children are no longer frightened of failure

"It is raising children's self-esteem. It has improved over the year for all the children." (Y6T)

“The top children have always been able to give opinions confidently. BA and A children have now come up to this and are willing to talk about what they can and can’t do. The success criteria have raised the poorer writers’ self-esteem, because they feel they’ve achieved something.” (Y2T)

“Distance marking using highlights where children have had success-you do get a reaction-they positively glow at times.” (Y3T)

“The children’s self esteem has definitely improved. For instance, Amy would not have talked with you in September, because she had no confidence in her work. Now they don’t get upset if they get things wrong but are proud when they get their learning right. They all realise that no-one is perfect.” (Y6T)

“Attitudes to failure have changed. If the children find something difficult it’s seen as a good thing. They will say ‘It’s hard-let’s have a go.’” (Y2T)

“Children’s self-esteem has improved-when they see success. This has happened especially at the lower level. The children are better at helping each other.” (Y1T)

“They can see that everyone makes mistakes and everyone needs to improve. They all know they’re working towards something. It’s been a leveller-they now seem more able to look for learning support.” (Y3T)

“There is a real learning culture. They understand that they are the learners.” (Y5T)

The impact on children’s learning

A small minority of teachers said that it was too soon to see any impact on children’s learning and a similar number said it was difficult to know whether formative assessment had caused any learning gains. All other teachers stated that there had been an improvement in children’s achievement as a result of the project. The most common comments, across both Key Stages were as follows:

- Children are more focused and aware of what they are learning
- Children’s writing has improved
- Most children’s achievement has been greater

“Children did better in SATs than last year.” (Y2T)

“There’s an immense sense of achievement when they reach a target. They compare what they’ve done to their [previous efforts, not to others’. One boy in a low ability group said to his support assistant ‘Go away, I want to do it on my own.’” (Y6T)

“It’s improved the quality of work through better motivation and a sense of purpose.” (Y6T)

“It works for all children, particularly helped the quiet children and those that are self-motivated-they can see progress. It has swung their attitudes more towards

learning rather than activities. They will now come into the class and say ‘What are we learning today?’ not ‘What are we doing?’” (Y2T)

“I have compared this Y2 attainment in the KS1 tests with their Baseline predictions and, generally speaking, overall, they have done better than predicted.” (Y2T)

“The children see themselves as they key players, as the learners. It has been very positive. Next September I think the school will include most of it in all lessons. I think we may use focused marking across subjects, not just in Literacy. The brighter pupils have moved forward, but it’s also true for lower abilities, but perhaps not so much.” (Y6T)

“The biggest impact has come from knowing the learning intention and success criteria. Work handed in is much tighter and less woolly.” (Y3T)

“Our English KS2 SAT results were inexplicably better than I thought they’d be. I have tried when I am on courses as a participant to think, ‘Would this be better if they had shared the learning intentions and success criteria?’ It must be made compulsory!!” (Y6T)

“The parents talk about what they’ve been learning to do. There’s been an incredible difference for the children since September.” (Y2T)

“I think it’s fantastic. The children and me have got a lot out of it. We are all more focused. I think we will have a higher number of Level 2s this year. “ (Y2T)

The impact on teaching

Almost all teachers commented that the main difference in their teaching was that **they were now consistently teaching to learning intentions instead of activities**. Lessons had, as a result, become more focused and the structure of lessons was more clearly defined. This, in turn, meant that planning had improved, with activities more likely to match learning intentions.

“Teachers have focused their attention on exactly what they hope children will get out of the lessons they have planned.” (Y5T)

“I have certainly added the strategies to my repertoire. If I was sent to China, I’d keep doing them.” (Y4T)

“It has become second nature to my way of working.” (Y6T)

“It has made me reflect on why I am doing certain lessons-whether what I’m doing is truly incremental for children’s learning.” (Y4T)

“I have taken on board the very sound principles behind formative assessment. The main thing is not to get fetishist about the strategies but to hold the principles and adapt the strategies to fit in with your intuitive ways of working.” (Y4T)

“Sharing of learning intentions has made a huge difference to the way I plan and teach.” (Y6T)

“I think it has kept me on track. It has made me realise that some schemes of work try to get me to do too much. The pressure to cover! But you have to do it in bite sized chunks, in more detail-there is too much to fit in the time, but you have to stop yourself feeling guilty.” (Y4T)

“It makes me make things clearer to the children. I really define my expectations now.” (Y3T)

“I listen to children more and can assess their needs better. “ (Y6T)

“It’s completely changed the way I teach! It’s turned everything on its head. My teaching is what feels instinctively right for me. I love the short steps. I love the specifics, I love that it happens in your brain and not in the teacher’s mouth. Everything is possible-even if it’s wrong we can sort it out. It hasn’t taken the pressure off but my job feels more worthwhile. I’m more confident to say to OFSTED that I haven’t covered x because they needed y. My priority is the learning, not coverage. It took me ages to get into it but now I couldn’t teach any other way.” (Y3T)

PART SIX: FINAL CONCLUSIONS

“I’ve changed my culture of marking from ‘all wrong’ to ‘making it better’”

It seems fitting to begin this section with typical quotes from children and teachers about the impact of the formative assessment project through the year. This is followed by OFSTED views, the results of the test data and conditions for success. This section follows on from the more detailed ‘Final impact’ section on Page 37.

Children’s and teachers’ views

Sharing learning intentions and success criteria

Children:

“It helps because you can try to do what they are looking for-because you want to know, to learn things”

“It makes you think about what you have to do, what you have to concentrate on.”

Teachers:

“They have a much deeper understanding. They really can pick up on the learning intention and apply it in the next lesson and remember it.”

“I can see the benefits of knowing the success criteria. Their answers show they have used it as a guide and it’s no longer just neatness they concentrate on. They told me they hold the success criteria in their minds as they work. I see a big difference.”

Self-evaluation

Children:

“It’s self evaluation-it means you can learn from your mistakes-it’s thinking about what you do.”

“I like ‘What did you find difficult and how did you solve it?’ because it makes you think how you got out of your difficulties and what to do next time.”

Teachers:

“It sets them up for the future-gives them confidence to articulate their thoughts, to admit what is hard and why, so they are open for strategies and explanations.”

“The one big impact is that they are using the questions to help each other. I hear them say to each other ‘I’ve had a problem with that’ just as I might say it and then they help each other.”

Focused feedback

Children:

“It really think it has improved my writing because now we can improve it whereas before she didn’t ask us to improve it. Now we know how to make it better.”

“Normally teachers just tick it. Miss M highlights and you know what she likes so next time you can use the same thing in a different way, or use that word again.”

Teachers:

“I feel more focused and I’m more inclined to make my comments relevant to the learning intention. It keeps me from getting carried away by spellings and handwriting.”

“I’ve changed my culture of marking from all wrong to making it better.”

Writing targets

Children:

“It makes you see how you need to improve on a certain topic, instead of trying to work your way round it, you know just what to make better.”

“It’s to help me learn. If I’ve got a target I try to work to get the target. If I get something wrong I get a target so that I can get it right.”

Teachers:

“Children are more aware of what they are aiming for, and they like to focus on one small thing.”

“They are more proud because they’ve been involved in their learning. They are more aware of the nature of their achievement.”

OFSTED’s views

The zone’s OFSTED report contained two paragraphs about the impact of the formative assessment project, as follows:

In the majority of schools visited during the inspection, teachers were routinely using ‘learning intentions’ and success criteria of their lessons. Displays of these aspects of lesson planning were common and pupils were very familiar with their purpose. Some schools have retained the approach unaltered, whereas others have improved their practice further by assimilating the principles of the project into their own school’ short and medium term lesson planning. The approach was most successful in those schools where teachers received direct encouragement and support from senior managers. Although many of the teachers were using the success criteria to set targets for the future, the use of self-assessment was less common.

The formative assessment initiative is improving the quality of planning, target setting and the clarity of focus in lessons. Benefits are accruing in all subjects and, significantly, in relation to numeracy and literacy. There are high levels of support from zone and university staff, which ensures that good progress is maintained. These factors are embedding practice in the schools so that the improvements are

likely to be sustained beyond the life of the zone. The 'Excellence in Class' team have included formative assessment as an aspect of their work with schools to consolidate and develop further the work of the project. This approach is welcomed by the zone schools and is already proving to be successful.

Test analysis

The most comprehensive data collected throughout the project was the qualitative data gathered as a result of interviews with teachers and children and observations. This data was analysed in depth and used to draw conclusions about the different aspects of formative assessment-what worked well and what didn't. The 'action research' focus of the project was fully realised through the analysis of this powerful data from an enormous range of teachers and children. It is from the body of the three reports that the most helpful findings and advice for future practice can be found.

As well as this, the results of the Hodder and Stoughton reading and numeracy tests and teachers' opinions about writing levels, which took place both before and after the project, were also analysed in great detail by the Thomas Coram Research Unit at the Institute of Education.

A number of key points emerged, although, as always with such pre and post testing, a number of caveats need to be borne in mind:

- It is virtually impossible to ensure that a control group has had no intervention, which would raise test results
- The content of the tests determine what children do well at, and this might not be matched with what the project aimed for children to improve at

Focusing on formative assessment is, by its very nature, a long-term educational and cultural shift towards a learning environment rather than a coverage and delivery environment, so the first year is very much a foundation stage. The Gillingham project was a comprehensive study with **all** schools and teachers involved, unlike the majority of studies to date in which the participants are willing volunteers.

Bearing these points in mind, the following findings emerged from the analysis of the test data:

Reading

- Twelve of the 15 Gillingham schools showed an improvement in their scores over the period of the intervention, compared with 8 out of the 11 control schools.
- Girls did better than boys in 5 of the 15 Gillingham schools and in 5 of the 11 control schools.
- Across the year groups in the Gillingham schools, the difference between the first and last tests is shown below. Since this test was age standardised the expectation is of no change: a positive change indicates more progress than would have been

expected and a negative score indicates less progress than would have been expected for their age.

Year 1	+ 0.5%
Year 2	+1%
Year 3	+5%
Year 4	-0.5%
Year 5	+1%
Year 6	+0.5%

Numeracy

- Fourteen of the 15 Gillingham schools showed an increase in their numeracy scores, as did 9 of the 11 control schools.
- More improvement was made in the numeracy tests than in the reading tests. Fewer schools had negative differences in the numeracy test results than in the reading tests.
- Girls did better than boys in 6 of the 15 Gillingham schools and 5 of the 11 control schools
- Across the year groups in the Gillingham schools, the difference between the first and last numeracy tests is shown below. Since this test was age standardised the expectation is of no change: a positive change indicates more progress than would have been expected and a negative score indicates less progress than would have been expected for their age.

Year 1	No change
Year 2	+4%
Year 3	+13% (the most significant improvement)
Year 4	-3%
Year 5	+7%
Year 6	+5%

Writing

- For the writing level, one Gillingham school did not provide follow up scores; only 5 of the 11 control schools provided writing levels for both the beginning and end of the year.
- All schools showed an improvement in their writing levels. Since this is not age standardised, it is not possible to tell if this is more than would have been expected over the nine months.

- Girls did better than boys in 8 of the Gillingham schools and 2 of the 5 control schools.
- Across the year groups in the Gillingham schools, the difference between the first and last writing levels is shown below.

Year 1	+1.5%
Year 2	+1.75%
Year 3	+0.75%
Year 4	+1%
Year 5	+1.75%
Year 6	+2%

General points

Schools showing big improvements in one test area did not necessarily show big improvements in the other two. Therefore, there was no evidence that schools performing well on one of the tests did well on all of the tests.

For each Gillingham school, pupils performed better in the numeracy tests than in the reading tests. Only 5 of the 11 control schools had a change in numeracy test scores greater than that in reading.

Conditions for success

The impact of the project will have been affected by many factors. Conditions for the success of formative assessment appear to be as follows:

- **As with any change or initiative, the head and senior management team need to offer a high level of support and commitment and ensure that in-school follow up is offered to teachers throughout the year.**
- **Teachers beliefs about how children learn dominate their approach to formative assessment so that, if a behaviourist approach is preferred, only lip service will be paid to sharing learning goals, pupil self evaluation and so on, with these elements seen as unnecessary additions. Those who believe in a constructivist approach recognise formative assessment as something that resonates with their existing practice of involving children in discussion about their learning and are therefore able to embed it in their practice and enjoy its impact on children's achievement and self-esteem.**
- **The language teachers use in their ongoing dialogue with children when using formative assessment has been shown, by many teachers, to raise children's**

self-esteem. It is important, therefore, to similarly identify ongoing language which causes the reverse.

- **Schools encounter greater impact of formative assessment the further they have to travel along its route. Those who have introduced it over time clearly have a shorter distance to go and are perhaps more involved in deeper analysis of the specific elements of formative assessment in action.**
- **There are known differences between the subject areas in terms of how easy or difficult it is to effect change. Writing for example is more difficult to improve and takes much longer than mathematics, so needs more time and persistence.**
- **Pupil mobility, staff mobility and staff access to staff development, teacher confidence and subject expertise are all key factors in ensuring the success of continued formative assessment, so there need to be school strategies in place to minimise the effects of these elements.**
- **Although the project focused on practical ‘ways in’ for teachers as a means of understanding the research principles, what matters is that teachers make formative assessment their own, following the principles rather than adhering slavishly to practical suggestions**
- **Formative assessment concerns the dynamics of teaching and learning, about which there is no finite answer and never will be. Teachers and schools need to see themselves as action researchers, continually striving to find out more about conditions for improving children’s learning, whether through formative assessment or by any other means.**

PART SEVEN: Summary of the findings

Analysis of the target setting strategies adopted by teachers

1. Overview

All 15 schools had devised systems, most of which were individual target approaches. Most Year 6 teachers found the dominating effect of SATs had made it difficult to focus in target setting.

2. Target systems

a) Group targets

A few teachers were using group target setting, deciding writing targets from KS2 SAT results, TA levels and individual writing needs.

Group targets are a means of distorting curriculum coverage so that more time is spent on identified weakness areas.

b) Individual writing targets

These consisted of cards or flaps in a variety of formats

c) Social targets

A minority of infant teachers had organised social targets, both individually and whole class, usually limiting them and often recording success visually as a motivating element. Flexibility of approach was seen to be important.

3. Manageability of individual target setting

a) Creating achievable targets

Sources of targets

Teachers either drew targets from the LEA targets sheets, sometimes modifying them, or based them on children's writing needs.

b) Phrasing and tone of targets

The different types of targets identified were as follows:

- **Target phrased as an instruction**
'Write in sentences'
- **Target phrased as an affirmation**
'I am going to put a full stop at the end of each sentence'
- **Target phrased as an achievement before the event**
'I can use paragraphs'
- **Target phrased as a goal**
'To be able to spell cvc words'
- **Target phrased in terms of general improvement**
'To improve the quality of handwriting and presentation'
- **Target phrased as learning**
'I am learning to use finger spaces'
- **Target phrased as a learning strategy**
'To explore a thesaurus to find alternatives to the word said'
- **Target phrased as an aide memoire**
'Remember to leave spaces between each word'
- **Target phrased in terms of effort**
'To attempt to spell a high frequency word independently'

b) Tracking targets

The tracking of each child's individual target was seen as the most difficult organisational feature, but the more involved the child in the tracking of the target, tallying times achieved and choosing the next target, the more manageable the system is.

Approximately half of the teachers decided to track children's targets themselves. The other half gave children ownership.

4. Children's understanding of target-setting

Most children perceived target setting as a strategy to help them improve. Some infant children could not read their targets. Two important issues were identified by children: what the target means and how to go about achieving it.

a) Understanding the system

Almost all children could explain the target setting system.

b) Children's views of the purpose of target-setting

Most children saw target setting as positive, something to help them to learn about and get better at writing.

Specific reasons for target setting were:

- *Targets were reminders from the teacher about areas for improvement*
- *There was a point to having one target at a time*
- *Targets were set to prepare you for the next stage*
- *Target-setting helps build up expertise step by step*
- *Targets can be motivating*

c) How children say they use targets

Nearly all children understood their current target. Most of these used the written target as a visual reminder of their goal and visibility was appreciated. There seemed to be two ways of using the targets as reminders: the 'read-memorise-check' method and the 'continuous tracking' method.

The remaining children said they 'tried hard'.

A key issue identified was that children need to know *how* to go about achieving their target.

d) Achieving targets

Children explained that targets were achieved quickly:

- When they were 'too easy' in the first place
- When the class work gave them lots of opportunities to try their target (e.g. handwriting targets)
- When they put effort in and concentrated
- When they were already doing part of the target
- When they were given extra practice on their target by the teacher or when their teacher made their target a focus of lesson introductions

Children explained that targets took a long time to achieve when:

- Children didn't remember they had a target card

- Targets were too demanding (some had multiple items to be achieved; some involved going and finding a word bank or dictionary and looking things up during each piece of writing)
- Targets were hard (they involved things children knew they weren't good at)
- Class work did not always give them the opportunity to practise the target
- Targets involved something children didn't like doing
- Children kept forgetting to apply the target; it was difficult to think of the target AND compose the writing at the same time
- Children couldn't concentrate because the person next to them kept talking
- Children couldn't read the target
- Children worried about the target
- Children didn't really understand what they were meant to be trying to do

Most children expressed satisfaction and pride at achieving their target.

e) Children's suggestions for future targets

The majority of children proposed targets which were specific and dealt with one of the main component parts of writing.

f) Children's views about the worth and feasibility of targets

Most children thought that writing targets were a good idea

5. The impact of target setting on children's writing

The following comments were most frequently made:

Key Stage One

- Children are more aware of what they are aiming for
- Children like to focus on one small thing
- It works well with some children, especially those of average and above average ability
- There has been improvement but it is difficult to know what has caused it
- It is too soon to judge

Key Stage Two

- Children can see what needs to improve and apply their improvements
- Children like the system
- It has had a positive effect on their attitude
'They are more proud because they've been involved in their learning'
'They are more aware of the nature of their achievement'
- Those who try hard have responded well
- The general quality of writing has improved as a result of targets
- Children now check their work more often
- There has been improvement but it is difficult to know what has caused it
- It is too soon to judge

Ways Forward for target-setting

It seems clear that individual writing targets for some children both motivate and give a clear focus for achievement. However, a number of factors need to be balanced when deciding whether to introduce individual targets wholesale:

Setting matched targets is the first hurdle, best done in conference with the child and with some kind of target prompts, as in the sheets given out on the INSET day. These often need to be broken down and quantified (specific examples and number needed spelled out).

Keeping track of the subsequent progress is probably the most difficult organisational feature and works best when children are encouraged to keep a tally of how many times they have achieved their target. Clearly, the clearer and better quantified the individual target, the easier it is for a child to recognise its achievement.

Ways in which teachers appear to have had the most success have been as follows:

- Investing a lot of time at the outset in negotiation with each child to explain and decide his or her first target-setting the scene for the whole focus.
- Making sure the target is crystal clear and matches the child's ability
- Getting children to tally each time they believed they had achieved their target
- Making flaps, cards or other devices visible and easy to handle
- Making sure the child knows how to go about meeting the target
- Making sure there will be opportunities for the child to cover and therefore achieve the target, or, at least, saying when it is unnecessary to refer to the target.

Development of the previous elements of formative assessment introduced during the year

1. Sharing learning intentions and developing success criteria for lessons

Teachers, in general, had found sharing learning intentions and developing success criteria the most useful and successful of all the strategies. Nearly all had slightly adapted the initial suggestions to meet their individual needs and the needs of their children, such as focusing on the language of 'We are learning to' instead of the acronym 'WALT', streamlining the writing up for children to see and maybe removing the characters, if they had them. There was clear awareness of teachers' developing expertise, such as being able to link activities more specifically to learning intentions.

2. Pupil self-evaluation

Teachers found this the hardest aspect of formative assessment and a small minority of teachers had stopped doing it, especially those with younger

children. Nevertheless, there was still a great deal of self-evaluation taking place. Many teachers said that the self-evaluation, in general, and the use of starting point questions had become more informal. Only certain lessons were generally targeted for self-evaluation. Some Year 5 and Year 6 teachers said that the language and spirit of self evaluation had become part of the process of working through an activity, with the questions asked as children were going along (by teachers and children alike), rather than only at the end. This was seen to have had a positive impact on children's ability to take control over their learning, enabling them to be continually reflective and analytical.

3. Focused feedback against learning intentions

Teachers were asked if there had been any further developments with giving oral feedback against learning intentions or marking giving feedback about successes and improvement suggestions. A third of the teachers said they had made no changes and a small minority of 11 teachers said they had not used the strategy since last term.

A third of teachers said they were indicating successes orally with children as a new departure.

Teachers made many more positive than negative comments about their work on feedback. The following points derived from interview responses show the range of positive effects of focusing feedback on the learning intention:

- Children's written and oral responses are very positive
- Teachers would like to have time to do it more often
- Children's writing has improved
- It makes the teacher focus on the right things
- Children like to mark their work in pairs focusing on success and improvement
- Many teachers want to plan for this in September

Fewer negative responses were made, but the following indicates the range of concerns:

- SATs got in the way
- It is difficult to give feedback when children are organised in sets
- Found it hard to do distance marking in Y2, because too many children need help reading the improvement suggestion although the highlighting works and having only a group at a time makes it manageable
- Even given orally, it needs more time to get younger children to make improvements on their work

Overall impact of the project, taking account of significant factors

1. Significant Factors

a) Conscription

The decision to involve all teachers in the project was made by the headteachers and the Project Director, based on the premise that there would

be greater impact if all were involved. Within the heads' group, two to three preferred the idea of an INSET only model, without the rigorous research element. Although the heads were urged to inform their staff carefully and enthusiastically of their involvement in the project, we know that their introduction to it was very varied.

b) Uniformity

As a 'way in' to formative assessment, teachers were given practical strategies to try in their classrooms. There was a continual emphasis on the importance of teachers and schools being flexible, adapting the suggestions to suit their needs, and using their own ideas as well. However, in some schools, the heads, through concern over consistency, insisted that all teachers use identical approaches, language and visual aids.

c) Pre and post testing

In order to make the project as rigorous as possible, the heads group decided to opt for pre and post testing with the involvement of a control group. Hodder and Stoughton Reading and Numeracy tests were issued and administered by the teachers in the first two weeks of the autumn term. This set the project off in a negative way, because teachers resented having to ask their children to experience the tests, which were unfamiliar in format compared to the statutory SATs. There was also irritation about the workload involved in marking the tests. As a result of this, funding was later made available so that all tests could be externally marked at the post-testing stage.

d) Teachers' beliefs about learning

As Black and Wiliam (1998) pointed out, formative assessment sits easily with a constructivist belief of learning and a concern that all can succeed. Where the teacher adheres to delivery and coverage as the key focus for helping children learn, formative assessment will be seen as 'another thing to do' which gets in the way.

It is vital that these factors are taken into account when interpreting the data collected and reading the findings outlined in the three reports for this project. Considering the negative aspects, we feel gratified that the power of formative assessment, over time, convinced most of the reluctant teachers and heads that there were worthwhile gains to be had. The detail of the three reports illustrates the continual enthusiasm of all the children and the growing enthusiasm of the teachers. It should not be understated that, from the outset, many heads and teachers were extremely positive and enthusiastic. A great many children and teachers reported significant development, in increased teacher expertise, greater pupil achievement, raised self esteem, the creation of a 'learning culture' and the emergence of children as 'life-long learners.'

2. Impact of the whole project

a) The use of formative assessment strategies among support staff working with children with SEN

A special study was conducted to review the use of formative assessment amongst support staff working with children with special educational needs.

Introduction

This report adds to the classteachers' data, the practices and views of 10 (ten) Special Educational Needs (SEN) personnel in schools. The interviewees comprised: 6 LSAs (Learning Support Assistants) 2 SENCOs and 2 Special Needs Teachers.

Interviewees were asked about the children with whom they work. Those children displayed a variety of special needs including Physical Disability, Cerebral Palsy, EDB, Autism, ADHD and language skills development.

They were also asked about each of the formative assessment strategies in turn - their implementation and impact. The following sections report the views of support staff on each strategy.

Sharing learning intentions

As part of formative assessment, the sharing of learning intentions enables the child to know the purpose of the activity. Among all ten (10) interviewees, the learning intention was shared either through the use of the acronym TIB ('This is because') or WALT ('We are learning to..'), depending on the devices used by each school, or through oral or written means.

Implementation

Nine of the ten personnel interviewed explained that they were actively involved in sharing learning intentions with the pupils they teach. The remaining LSA did not share learning intentions because she believed that *"the children are not bothered about the learning intention"*.

The majority of interviewees (7) used the acronym TIB or WALT according to the approach taken by the particular school. In one Infant school the Special Needs Teacher introduced the learning intention through soft toys representing TIB/WALT.

Impact

Seven out of ten support staff who were interviewed felt that children with SENs are able to understand the learning intention. They also felt that knowing what the learning intention was made a difference to the children's performance on the tasks/activities.

Sharing success criteria

Implementation

One SEN teacher and one SENCO interviewed reported that they did not directly communicate success criteria to children, far less get children to generate the success criteria. All six (6) LSAs reported that mainly the class teacher did sharing of success criteria. They had no involvement in creating or getting children to create the success criteria. LSAs worked only for short bursts of time with children (around 20 minutes) before the class regrouped, they felt pressured into talking about what children needed to do to complete the task and so avoided spending time on sharing success criteria.

The general feeling was that SEN children are not able to suggest what the teacher would look for in their work

Impact

The two members of staff who did invite children to suggest the success criteria believed that children gained from it:

Despite the view that there may not be time in short sessions to share learning intentions and success criteria, interviewees felt that knowing the success criteria (WILF), from the teacher, has an overall positive effect on children's learning.

Summary

The majority of interviewees (8) felt that there are some benefits in sharing learning intentions and success criteria with children with SENs in their focused groups. However their main concern was, because children with SENs took a longer time to understand what is told to them, the time spent on explaining learning intentions and success criteria took precious time away from helping the children to develop concepts and skills.

Pupil self-evaluation

Interviewees were asked about their involvement in pupils' self-evaluation sessions and whether children with SENs were able to see what is good or not so good about their work.

Implementation

Six out of the ten people interviewed had no involvement in this aspect of the lesson.

After activities had been completed, children rejoined their class group for a plenary session, in which self-evaluations may take place.

Those involved in pupil self-evaluation (4) found it was not always necessary to use the poster of questions suggested at INSET.

Impact

Only three interviewees believed that the children they worked with were able to self-evaluate. These were junior children who were able to say what they were happy about in their work and where they went wrong in their work.

All interviewees agreed that, self-evaluation is as important for SEN children as for other children, but needed more work:

Summary

Six (6) interviewees were not involved in pupil self-evaluation. Of the four who did get involved, only three actually thought that children with SENs were able to self-evaluate successfully. However, it was the general view that pupil self-evaluation is a valuable exercise for all children.

Oral feedback and focused marking against learning intentions

Oral feedback

Making children aware of the extent to which they have actually met the success criteria is an essential part of formative assessment. During the course of the interview, SEN personnel were asked whether it was easy to stick to the learning intention and success criteria when giving oral feedback to children.

Half of the sample (5) found it easy to stick to the learning intention and success criteria when giving feedback. The other half found it difficult.

Most SEN teachers/LSAs (9) were able to adopt similar approaches to teachers in mainstream classes when giving oral feedback. However they did find difficulty phrasing the feedback.

Strategies commonly used were;

- Scaffold prompts
- Example prompts
- Reminder prompts
- 'Own strategies', such as simple questions to prompt children to check what they have written.

Impact

Of those interviewees who gave oral feedback to the children in their group, the general response was that they (the SEN personnel) were able to speak to children about what they managed to do well.

Focused marking against the learning intention

Only three interviewees were involved in distance marking. The others felt that children with SENs are not ready for this type of marking.

Summary

Nine interviewees were keen on giving oral feedback related to the learning intention and found this to be very effective. Distance marking was only carried out by three of the ten interviewees. The more popular view was that children with SENs were not ready for this type of marking.

Target setting

Generally it is the class teacher who sets targets, so when children go to their SEN groups they have already had their individual targets. Only three personnel interviewed had involvement in setting targets for children (two SENCOs and one SEN teacher) and this mainly linked to writing IEPs (although in four cases the class teacher also wrote the IEPs). The general feeling among SEN personnel was that there is no real difference between individual targets and IEP targets, except perhaps that IEPs tended to span a longer period and tended to be more behavioural, such as "*Sit still in a group for 5 minutes.*"

As a result of using some of the formative assessment strategies, all interviewees felt that IEPs should now be more ongoing. In planning IEPs they should look for gaps in children's learning and make it apparent to the children, so the target becomes more relevant to improvement.

Conclusion

All interviewees were in favour of the formative assessment strategies being used with children with SENs. However, some felt that not all the strategies were useful if taken too literally for the children they teach. Sharing learning intentions was viewed by 9 out of the 10 interviewed to be very relevant and needed for children with SENs. Oral feedback to the learning intention was implemented by almost all the interviewees and had improved children's work in some cases.

The level of involvement of SEN personnel in implementing the formative assessment strategies varied according to classroom management strategies and the roles they were expected to play by classteachers. For example, LSAs had little involvement in sharing success criteria, pupil self-evaluation and in marking. However, those who were able to implement sharing success criteria found it quite useful and were able to adapt it to include very young children in the infants. Most of those who tried pupil self evaluation found that it enabled children to reflect on their work.

In general the feeling was that although the model of formative assessment was taken on board, some future work was needed in developing the strategies in particular ways in order to make them as effective as possible with children with SENs.

b) Overall impact of the project on children's self-esteem, learning and achievement and teaching

Finally, teachers were asked to look back at the impact of the whole project in term of the following areas: the impact on children's self-esteem, the impact on learning and achievement and the impact on their teaching.

The impact on self-esteem

Key Stage One

Most teachers said that

- Children are now able to confidently tackle new things
- Children are no longer scared to be wrong
- Children are now more involved in their own learning

Key Stage Two

Most teachers said that

- The rise in self-esteem had been noticeable
- All children feel they have something to be proud of
- Children are no longer frightened of failure

The impact on children's learning

Most teachers stated that there had been an improvement in children's achievement as a result of the project. The most common comments, across both Key Stages were as follows:

- Children are more focused and aware of what they are learning
- Children's writing has improved

- Most children's achievement has been greater

The impact on teaching

Almost all teachers commented that the main difference in their teaching was that **they were now consistently teaching to learning intentions instead of activities**. Lessons had, as a result, become more focused and the structure of lessons was more clearly defined. This, in turn, meant that planning had improved, with activities more likely to match learning intentions.

Final conclusions

This section began with many positive quotes from teachers and children about the impact of the project.

Key lines from the zone's OFSTED report:

The formative assessment initiative is improving the quality of planning, target setting and the clarity of focus in lessons.

These factors are embedding practice in the schools so that the improvements are likely to be sustained beyond the life of the zone.

Test Analysis

Bearing in mind various caveats:

Reading

- Twelve of the 15 Gillingham schools showed an improvement in their scores over the period of the intervention, compared with 8 out of the 11 control schools.
- Girls did better than boys in 5 of the 15 Gillingham schools and in 5 of the 11 control schools.
- Across the year groups in the Gillingham schools, the difference between the first and last tests is shown below. Since this test was age standardised the expectation is of no change: a positive change indicates more progress than would have been expected and a negative score indicates less progress than would have been expected for their age.

Numeracy

- Fourteen of the 15 Gillingham schools showed an increase in their numeracy scores, as did 9 of the 11 control schools.
- More improvement was made in the numeracy tests than in the reading tests. Fewer schools had negative differences in the numeracy test results than in the reading tests.
- Girls did better than boys in 6 of the 15 Gillingham schools and 5 of the 11 control schools
- Across the year groups in the Gillingham schools, the difference between the first and last numeracy tests is shown below. Since this test

was age standardised the expectation is of no change: a positive change indicates more progress than would have been expected and a negative score indicates less progress than would have been expected for their age.

Writing

- For the writing level, one Gillingham school did not provide follow up scores; only 5 of the 11 control schools provided writing levels for both the beginning and end of the year.
- All schools showed an improvement in their writing levels. Since this is not age standardised, it is not possible to tell if this is more than would have been expected over the nine months.
- Girls did better than boys in 8 of the Gillingham schools and 2 of the 5 control schools.
- Across the year groups in the Gillingham schools, the difference between the first and last writing levels is shown below.

General points

Schools showing big improvements in one test area did not necessarily show big improvements in the other two. Therefore, there was no evidence that schools performing well on one of the tests did well on all of the tests.

For each Gillingham school, pupils performed better in the numeracy tests than in the reading tests. Only 5 of the 11 control schools had a change in numeracy test scores greater than that in reading.

Lessons learnt

The impact of the project will have been affected by many factors. Conditions for the success of formative assessment appear to be as follows:

- **As with any change or initiative, the head and senior management team need to offer a high level of support and commitment and ensure that in-school follow up is offered to teachers throughout the year.**
- **Teachers beliefs about how children learn dominate their approach to formative assessment so that, if a behaviourist approach is preferred, only lip service will be paid to sharing learning goals, pupil self evaluation and so on, with these elements seen as unnecessary additions. Those who believe in a constructivist approach recognise formative assessment as something that resonates with their existing practice of involving children in discussion about their learning and are therefore able to embed it in their practice and enjoy its impact on children's achievement and self-esteem.**
- **The language teachers use in their ongoing dialogue with children when using formative assessment has been shown, by many teachers, to raise children's self-esteem. It is important, therefore, to similarly identify ongoing language which causes the reverse.**

- **Schools encounter greater impact of formative assessment the further they have to travel along its route. Those who have introduced it over time clearly have a shorter distance to go and are perhaps more involved in deeper analysis of the specific elements of formative assessment in action.**
- **There are known differences between the subject areas in terms of how easy or difficult it is to effect change. Writing for example is more difficult to improve and takes much longer than mathematics, so needs more time and persistence.**
- **Pupil mobility, staff mobility and staff access to staff development, teacher confidence and subject expertise are all key factors in ensuring the success of continued formative assessment, so there need to be school strategies in place to minimise the effects of these elements.**
- **Although the project focused on practical ‘ways in’ for teachers as a means of understanding the research principles, what matters is that teachers make formative assessment their own, following the principles rather than adhering slavishly to practical suggestions**
- **Formative assessment concerns the dynamics of teaching and learning, about which there is no finite answer and never will be. Teachers and schools need to see themselves as action researchers, continually striving to find out more about conditions for improving children’s learning, whether through formative assessment or by any other means.**

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