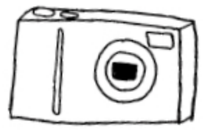
IDEA 10

Verbal feedback is good enough!

IDEA SNAPSHOT



In previous ideas, we've seen that feedback is one of the most effective ways to improve learning, but we should recognise that not everything can (or should) be marked. To strike a balance between quality and quantity of marking, let's take a look at what work we should not be marking and how verbal feedback can help.

Why are we so fixated on marking every piece of work that our students produce? What influences this? Is it assessment policies, school leaders or external inspectors? Parents or teacher habits? I do wonder whether what examination boards require teachers to do to evidence for qualifications trumps even the best teaching and learning policies, at least in terms of marking. Often, by the time a teacher has made it through a pile of books, weeks or months after students have submitted them for written comments, the opportunity to discuss and improve the work in class will have already passed us by!



How do we move forward in the future and strike a balance between quality and quantity? What will add most value to the teaching and learning process? Where does assessment fit within the curriculum? After all, the curriculum should be driving teaching and assessment, not the other way around. You will see evidence of this not being the case in schools where every classroom is testing students at a particular time of year, rather than according to the needs of the curriculum. Of course, school seasons follow a particular rhythm, but learning does not.

I have never been a fan of marking. I know some teachers are. However, I do recognise that marking, or at least assessment, is a teacher's greatest planning tool. There is a good reason why 'mark' comes before 'plan' in this book. Assessment informs our planning, and planning informs our teaching. The teaching provides us with assessment data, and hence, here is our ***Mark. Plan. Teach.*** loop.

The more I have delved into policy and teacher workload, the more I have been thinking seriously and cognitively about assessment. Dare I say, I actually enjoy marking and assessing much more now that I understand it at a deeper level than I did as a newly qualified teacher. What if our initial teacher training providers equipped all teachers with a better understanding of not only their subject knowledge, but also assessment and how we learn?

In terms of written feedback, marking should:

1. develop high-quality assessment
2. develop diagnostic feedback across all subjects
3. be realistic in terms of teacher workload
4. be approached with common sense by the school leadership
5. work for students and teachers from the outset.

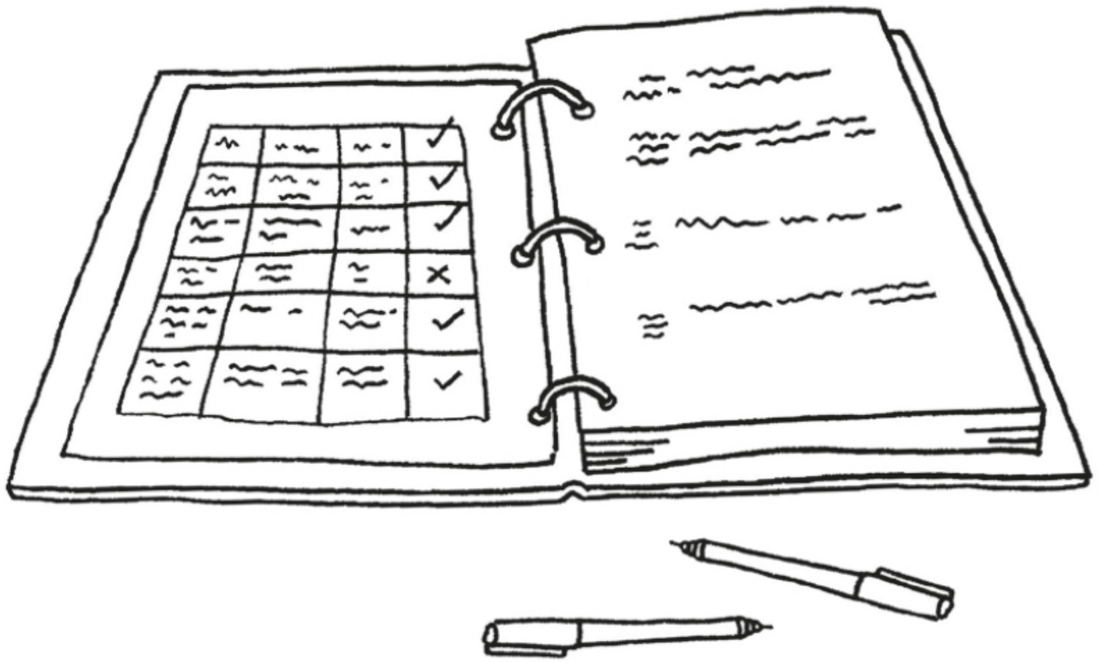
What should not be marked?

With all this in mind, let's take a brief moment to look at what teachers should not be marking to give them more freedom to mark less but with greater impact. The first thing I should mention (again!) is that context is king. Secondly, teachers should never be afraid of telling a student that their work is not yet good enough for them to spend time providing written feedback. Of course, how this is communicated is essential for student motivation and C3B4ME is a fantastic verbal feedback strategy to lessen a teacher's workload and place more impetus on the student to improve their work before submission.

Here are some other suggestions for reducing the quantity of work we mark in favour of the quality of our marking.

- Do not provide extensive or unnecessary written dialogue. In particular, you should avoid 'triple marking', whereby a teacher first marks the work, then a student responds to a teacher and the teacher is expected either to re-mark the work or reply to the student's actions. Research from the EEF says 'there is no strong evidence that "acknowledgement" steps in either dialogic or triple impact marking will promote learning' (Elliott et al., 2016).
- Do not bother leaving comments such as 'well done' or 'good' on students' work. It is a waste of time. Say it in person when returning the work to the student and only write clear action points in their book. Better still, reduce your workload and try zonal feedback (see Section 1, Idea 3, p. 18) or simply give instant verbal feedback.
- Do not promise students, parents or colleagues a particular frequency of marking work. It will mean you are marking for the sake of adhering to this schedule. As discussed in Section 1, Idea 4, p. 24, marking should be regular and proportionate to the curriculum. It's that simple.
- Do not mark every single page of work and avoid tick-and-flick. Instead, simply leave the work blank and communicate to the student exactly what will be assessed.

Section 2:
PLAN.



When I was a young and inexperienced teacher, I spent hours and hours planning lessons. It's a shame to see this still being expected of teachers twenty-five years later, especially among those with experience. Schools I have worked in would insist that teachers write lessons out in detail and then submit the plans to observers one week in advance. And as a newly qualified teacher, this was expected for every lesson. I've also heard of primary school teachers having to complete weekly overviews and being asked to submit these ahead of each week of teaching.

Even though the dialogue is shifting in most English schools, can you believe some schools are still forcing their teachers to do this? I can understand why it is requested in primary schools or in some secondary schools where classes are shared between teachers, but doing this for every lesson regardless of context really adds to teacher workload. It's like asking all drivers to resit their theory test every time they jump into a car to drive it away. It's worthy knowledge but we know drivers generally get better with road practice, and theory is useless without the practice. And why do we still insist in all routes into teaching that trainee teachers

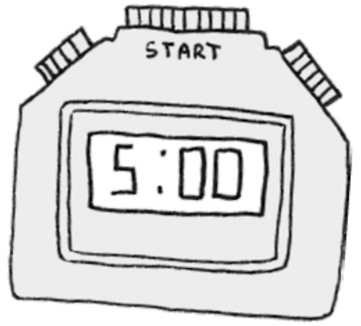
provide detailed lesson scripts that lead observers through lesson sequences, when the observers are not the ones actually teaching the lesson? Of course, teachers will always need to plan lessons and those new to the profession have to learn that process, but there are alternatives. Some initial teacher training providers are now looking at reshaping lesson plan scripts and also reconsidering evidence collection for qualified teacher status.

Is there a need for lesson planning on mass-produced templates or can teachers simply develop a lesson plan sequence that is coherent and clear and gets the best out of their pupils? Forcing teachers to complete a lesson plan on a particular template does not promote teacher autonomy. It simply increases workload. I've seen some large multi-academy trusts offer templates that are a useful starting point for reducing workload, but the key question is: can a teacher then adapt the content to suit their own style and context? Is there a need for any teacher to write – never mind submit – a lesson plan, other than when going through initial teacher induction? It's a crazy mindset we have in our profession. I'm all for developing and tweaking practice, but where is the freedom to trust teachers and help reduce their workload as they develop a repertoire and gain experience? After many years in the classroom, teachers should be permitted to rely on this experience to save them time when it comes to preparing for lessons. When I started to think deeply about writing this section of the book, I was inspired by a blog written by Jude Enright in 2013. Although Jude's blog dates back several years, it is still just as apt as it ever was before. Jude writes about how little time she had to plan lessons as a member of the senior leadership team in her school, meaning she relied on 'door knob lessons' – lessons she planned while turning the door knob to enter the classroom:

> 'When I joined [senior leadership], my lessons were invariably door knob lessons. You have so much extra to worry about, to solve, that you have very little time to spare and plan lessons.' (Enright, 2013)

I would argue that school leaders should also plan lessons, but of course, leadership workload gets in the way, and there are sometimes emergencies. Nonetheless, whether teacher or school leader, classroom lessons should be everyone's number one priority. All this goes to show that instead of asking each other to waste time writing things down, we would do better to trust experienced teachers to do what's right for them. We should also involve all teachers in planning for curriculum coherence.

In this section of the book, I provide you with a range of options to consider for lesson planning. We will question what we've always done, as well as consider cognitive processes to help better understand the mechanics needed behind planning to inform not only what a teacher needs to teach, but how and why.



For the past fifteen years, I've been using the **5 Minute Lesson Plan** to frame the process of planning on one page. It's perfect for working smarter and definitely reduces workload. There's a good reason why it's had nearly two million downloads on my website! All you need to do is trial it – nothing works for everyone, remember – and if you like it, suggest using it in your

EVIDENCE

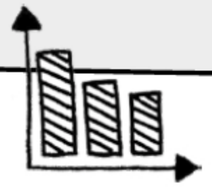
Do we really want our students copying learning objectives off the whiteboard and into their books? Every lesson, every day? Is copying out 'L.O. I can… so that…' the only means of sharing with children what they are learning and why they are learning it? These are things that teachers have become accustomed to in recent years, as teacher agency has been squeezed across the UK, but surely the answer to all these questions is no.

Do school leadership teams want their teachers to write lesson objectives on the board and have them on display every lesson? I don't. However, if I were to seek consistency because it may be viewed favourably by external agencies, then how would I answer that question? Well, my moral answer would still be no. We must ask ourselves whether this habit is present in our schools because we fear what external watchdogs want. If we want to deliver on our teachers being trusted, we have to create better conditions for our teachers to be autonomous. Does having a student regurgitate what they are learning in a lesson to a visitor prove that learning is taking place? Of course not. Instead, we should be doing what's right for our students.

As we saw in Section 1, Idea 1, p. 7, John Hattie's research suggests that 'goal setting' has a d=0.68 impact on student outcomes. This equates to progress of approximately half a grade over an academic year, so learning objectives clearly do have some impact. However, this doesn't mean simply asking students to record objectives or recite them every lesson. Doing so does not demonstrate progress or learning and simply supports evidence chasers, who want to appease observers when they examine students' books. It is not something that should be asked of students anywhere. Instead, we should be making sure students understand *why* they are learning what they are learning to help build a deeper understanding, encourage the application of knowledge and improve engagement. So do share and demonstrate learning objectives, but for goodness sake, don't write them down for anyone other than you or your students.

A little research into the matter...

In 2020, I caught up with John Hattie after he published a new meta-analysis of educational research on feedback: 'The Power of Feedback Revisited' (Wisniewski et al., 2020). The research considers his earlier findings from *Visible Learning* (2009) and takes into account assumptions from his work *The Power of Feedback* (Hattie and Timperley, 2007) and the importance of interpreting different forms of feedback as independent measures.





The early research of *Visible Learning* found the type of feedback made a difference to its level of impact, with praise, punishment, rewards, and corrective feedback all having low or low to medium effects on average, but corrective feedback being highly effective for enhancing the learning of new skills and tasks. Feedback using video or audio and computer-assisted feedback were found to have medium and high effects, with written comments being more effective than providing grades. If we approach this research from the point of view of learning objectives or success criteria and how teachers could set goals, it is critical that we look at feedback as a loop for learning to reinforce what should be taught next.

Hattie and Timperley (2007) argued that feedback can have different perspectives:

1. 'feed-up' (a comparison of the actual status with a target status)
2. 'feed-back' (a comparison of the actual status with a previous status)
3. 'feed-forward' (an explanation of the target status based on the actual status).

Wisniewski et al. write, 'Additionally, feedback can be differentiated according to its level of cognitive complexity' and later in the paper, they claim, 'One of the most consistent findings about the power of feedback is the remarkable variability of effects.' It has been shown that the majority of feedback in classes is task feedback, the most received and interpreted is about 'where to next', and the least effective is self feedback (feedback about personal characteristics) or praise feedback.

The researchers in this new paper say they are digging deeper into past research and removing duplicate studies that may influence overall effect sizes or recommendations. So, where does this leave teachers now in terms of feedback? Well, the academics conclude that feedback must be recognised as a complex and differentiated task; feedback has many different forms with, at times, quite different effects on student learning; and most importantly, feedback is more effective the more information it contains.

Put simply, feedback, on average, is powerful, but some feedback is more powerful, and this is what teachers must now consider when setting goals and using pupil responses to re-teach.

SECTION
MARK. PLAN. TEACH.
Idea 1

A Secure Overview

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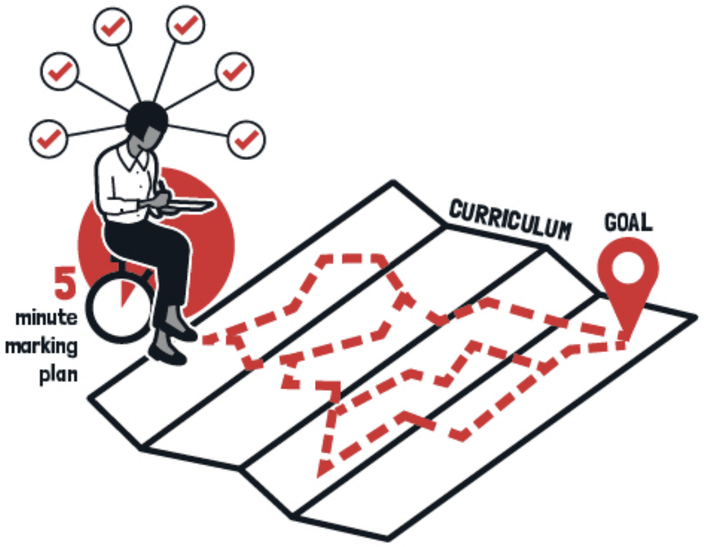


SNAPSHOT

Before you set an assessment and then sit down to mark it, you should first consider where you are in the curriculum and the purpose of setting and marking this specific piece of work. Think about the starting point, progress and context of each student.

The bigger picture

Imagine a map that is directing you where to go, with countless options ahead of you informing how you might get there. It is vital to have this bigger picture in place as part of curriculum planning and assessment.



Knowing your students



1

Prior attainment and results

Results | Literacy
Numeracy |
Learning needs



2

Their place in your course

Strengths and weaknesses
Class tracking
Target groups



3

Your classes and students

Behaviour | Attendance
Pastoral issues
Likes and interests

Reflecting on your marking and feedback



1

Bananarama Principle

It isn't what you do, it's the way that you do it.



2

Goldilocks Principle

Get the balance just right – not too much, not too little.



3

Matthew Effect

What can be done to support disadvantaged students and reduce the attainment gap?

SECTION
MARK. PLAN. TEACH.
Idea 2

Not Yet...

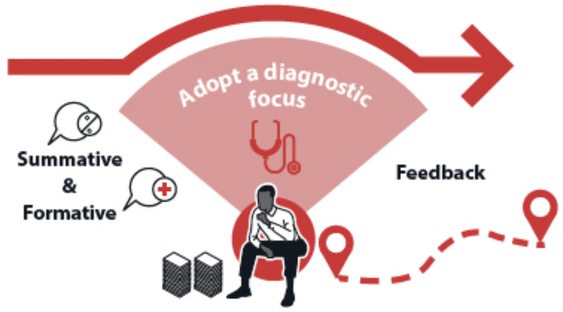
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ROSS MORRISON McGILL



SNAPSHOT

Use the powerful words 'not yet' in your marking to cut through complex grading systems and form a simple assessment framework that will motivate students.

Diagnostic focus



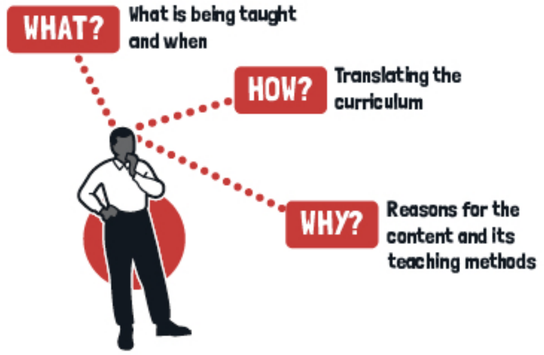
Both summative and formative marking should be diagnostic, namely we should make it clear to the student how to improve the piece of work and overall learning.

Not yet



The 'not yet' approach can be used in written feedback, but it is just as effective as verbal feedback. If students receive the grade 'not yet', they will understand they are on a learning curve.

Getting better



Marking for a new term ahead is a great way to use the 'not yet' method for diagnostic marking.

Where should I mark?



You may want to complete all your marking in school, either in your classroom, in the staffroom or in an empty office, but you may find it easier to mark at home.