

# Building students' skills in evaluating and editing their writing

*Helen Lines, University of Exeter. Co-researchers: Sarah Besley and Julie Fossey. An exploration of the understanding and skills that students in Year 4 and Year 10 need in order to judge the effectiveness of their writing and know how to improve it.*



This small-scale collaborative research project in one primary and one secondary school was designed to explore the demands placed on students in terms of evaluating and editing their writing, processes which have been given more prominent emphasis in the revised National Curriculum. In Primary schools, this includes a requirement to use grammatical terminology in discussions of effectiveness, while at Secondary level, greater weighting is given to critical evaluation of texts, including students' own, and analysis of language use. A short intervention in each classroom was devised and taught over the course of one term, designed to investigate the question 'Does students' understanding of improving writing develop when they take part in activities that focus on evaluating and editing writing?' Impact was judged

by qualitative analysis of students' pre- and post-intervention evaluations of peer writing samples, classroom observations and interviews with students.

Key findings were:

- **The intervention strengthened students' understanding of the terms 'evaluate' and 'edit';**
- **The discrete focus on the process of judgement-making built students' confidence in evaluating their own and others' writing;**
- **The key approach of making comparative judgements on writing samples (asking, 'Which is better and why?') encouraged students to respond as readers of texts and to use a broad range of evaluative criteria;**
- **For many students, evaluative judgements and suggestions for improving writing became more specific and detailed over the course of the intervention;**
- **Teacher modelling of editing decisions and use of reflective prompts encouraged students to make changes to their texts during the writing process and helped to make the abstract notion of 'effectiveness' more accessible;**
- **Students' editing suggestions sometimes revealed less-than-secure grammatical understanding, particularly at sentence level.**