

Objective

To see if the use of 'comments only' on tests affected student learning

Data Source / Study Setting

With a pre-Leaving Certificate Biology class I gave comments only on class tests.

Study Design

During the first term the students completed a class test at the end of each topic. At the end of the first term they sat their Christmas test.

Data Collection

After each test I recorded student marks in the usual method but gave the students comments only. For the end of term test I gave the students a formal test with marks awarded. I also surveyed their thoughts on this methodology of learning.

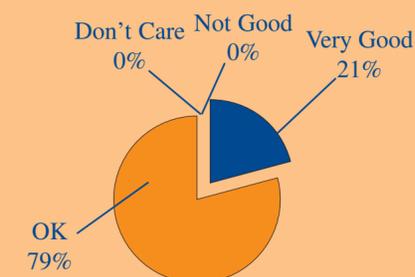
Principal Findings

- Almost all students showed an improvement in their term's results.
- The students in the 'C' grade bracket showed the greatest improvement.
- Most students preferred comments but requested that grades would also be included.

Conclusions / Discussion

- Greater discussion among students when they got their comments back – perhaps some of the improvement in learning was due to these discussions?
- The student comments on the questionnaire showed that they tended to use grades for comparison in the class rather than learning.
- Perhaps we, as teachers, should be more positive when dealing with students and help them to identify the more important points in a topic, particularly in pre-Leaving Certificate year.
- Giving comments only on student tests took more time than awarding a numerical or grade value.
- I would use the 'comment only' method again particularly with a pre-Leaving Certificate class finding it hard to 'settle down' following transition year.

What the students thought



Some student comments from the questionnaire:

'comments motivate learning'

'comments let you know where you went wrong'

'comments give you more interaction with the teacher and are more personal'

'high grades are more rewarding as they let you know your place in the class'

'comments are a waste of teachers time'

'negative comments hit home'

'comments don't show if you are improving or not'

'grades are forgotten but comments aren't'

'low grades dishearten'

'grades allow you to compare results'

'grades don't give you your strong or weak points'