IPEELL: Using Self-Regulation to Improve Writing

This page covers the first (efficacy) trial of Using Self-Regulation to Improve Writing, which tested whether it could work in schools under best possible conditions. To read about the second (effectiveness) trial - testing a scalable model under everyday conditions in a large number of schools - click here.

‘Self-Regulated Strategy Development’ or SRSD is an approach that supports the development of writing skills. It provides a clear structure that helps pupils to plan, monitor and evaluate their writing.

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EEF Summary

In 2012 the EEF funded this small study of the ‘IPEELL’ SRSD programme, for pupils making the transition from primary to secondary school. Year 6 and 7 pupils were given writing projects based on memorable experiences such as school trips. The IPEELL programme developers trained some teachers to use an SRSD approach to deliver these writing projects. Pupils whose teachers received the training were compared with pupils whose teachers did not.

The SRSD pupils made around 9 months’ additional progress in writing. Given the large impact and the strong prior evidence for SRSD, EEF funded a second trial of IPEELL, this time using a ‘scalable’ model that could reach more schools, without direct involvement from the developers.

In a second project, pupils using IPEELL for 2 years did make a small amount of additional progress compared to other pupils, but those using it for only one year appeared to make less progress. In addition, two years of IPEELL appears to have had a negative impact on maths and reading outcomes, possibly due to curriculum time being diverted towards writing.

There were some important differences between the two versions of IPEELL which might explain the different results. In particular, the ‘scalable’ model used teacher trainers who had never seen IPEELL delivered in the classroom, and was delivered in the last two years of primary school, rather than the end of Year 6 and first term of Year 7. Importantly, the second trial measured the average impact across all pupils, while the first looked only at pupils with low prior attainment. If we consider the results specifically for pupils with low prior attainment using IPEELL for two years, both trials show positive results, although the size of the impact is smaller for the scalable model.

For this reason, EEF is interested in whether another version of IPEELL can be developed, still scalable, but more similar to the original model, and targeted at Year 7 children with low prior attainment. Because of the mixed results to date, IPEELL is no longer listed as an EEF ‘promising project’. Schools considering IPEELL should carefully assess whether they can match the delivery conditions of the original, positive, project, and take measures to ensure that the increased focused on writing does not negatively affect reading and maths.
Research Results

Evaluation Conclusions

1. The approach had a strong positive effect on the writing outcomes of low attaining pupils at the transition from primary to secondary school among a sample of pupils in State schools in the West Yorkshire area.

2. The approach had beneficial effects for both FSM and non-FSM pupils.
3. These findings, in combination with existing evidence from the United States and elsewhere, suggest that the Self-Regulated Strategy Development approach has substantial promise as a literacy catch-up.

4. A larger effectiveness trial could be commissioned to test the approach on a larger scale and with other age groups.

5. Teachers were trained in the SRSD approach by the North American developers, but adapted it in some ways for an English context.