



## CASE STUDY REPORT

# STAR: Supporting through the arts - An initiative linking the arts to the development of writing

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*This study was originally published in 2009 as part of the 'What Works Well' initiative, part of the National Strategies for Education in England.*

## Abstract

**Background:** The purpose of the study was to improve pupils' attitudes to writing, raise standards of writing in STAR schools, and develop schools who value the arts for their own sake and for their potential in providing rich and stimulating opportunities for writing.

**Aims:** The main aim of the STAR Initiative is to raise standards in core subjects such as numeracy and literacy by providing stimulating creative arts contexts for learning.

**Methods:** The participants in the STAR Initiative are head of school improvement, headteachers, middle leaders, National Strategies consultants, senior leadership teams, SIPs, subject leaders, teachers, artists, and performers. The STAR Initiative used training, review meetings, specialist arts expertise, and tracking of target groups to improve pupils' attitudes to writing, raise standards, and develop schools' appreciation of the arts.

**Findings:** The STAR Initiative has had a profound impact on pupil learning, improving attitudes to writing and raising standards. It has also had an impact on teaching, with staff becoming more confident in delivering skills in literacy and developing cross-curricular links. School organisation and leadership have also been impacted, with the aims of the initiative being adopted into the planning for the following year.

**Implications:** The STAR Initiative has had a profound impact on pupil learning, teaching, and school organization and leadership. It has improved pupils' attitudes to writing, raised standards of writing, and increased staff motivation and confidence. It has also allowed for more creative and open-ended approaches to teaching and learning.

*This abstract was generated by Camtree using a large language model (LLM) and added to the original report in 2023.*

**Keywords:** Primary education; English - writing

## Introduction

### What were your reasons for doing this type of development work?

The STAR Initiative is a means by which the LA provides Focused Support for identified schools seeking innovative ways for raising attainment, either in Numeracy or aspects of provision for Literacy. The STAR Initiative seeks to raise standards in these Core subjects by providing exciting and stimulating creative arts contexts for learning. To ensure cohesion, the Associate Advisor and Literacy consultant linked their own 'inputs', as far as practicable, to the ideas and work of the different artists.

Curricular targets were implemented in some STAR schools, which became the focus for improving the standard of pupil's writing.

### Who might find this case study useful?

- Head of school improvement
- Headteacher
- Middle leader
- National Strategies consultant
- Senior leadership team (SLT)
- SIP (School Improvement Partner)
- Subject leader
- Teacher

## Description

### What specific curriculum area, subject or aspect did you intend to have impact on?

- English - writing

### How did you intend to impact on pupil learning?

It was our intention to impact on pupil's learning by providing a stimulating context, which, along with focused intervention, would improve pupil's attitudes to writing. A writing perceptions survey was carried out before and after the STAR Initiative in which many boys indicated a dislike of writing. After the Initiative, it was evident that perceptions had changed. Comments made by the children are included in the STAR Final Evaluation Report.

### What were your success criteria?

- To improve pupils' attitudes to writing
- To raise standards of writing in STAR schools
- To leave a legacy in the schools where cross-curricular links are made effectively
- To develop schools who value the arts for their own sake and for their potential in providing rich and stimulating opportunities for writing

### What information or data did you use to measure progress towards your success criteria?

- CVA data
- Data comparison of cohorts
- Logs or interviews
- Observation outcomes
- Periodic teacher assessment
- Pupil consultation data

- Test results

### Describe the CPD approaches you used

Training was given to the whole staff in some STAR schools by the Literacy Consultant, in relation to the setting and development of curricular targets and how these can be matched to the ability levels of the children within each class. Any training issues which were identified through the STAR initiative were addressed, these included the teaching sequence for writing and the development of guided group work.

Improvements in teaching strategies as a result of consultant input and an update of teachers' knowledge and skills.

STAR Review Meetings were held once a term where STAR co-ordinators met to discuss their work in school and to receive updates and information to support them in their role.

The following comments were written in the evaluation report about the CPD:

- Support has been provided for younger teachers and this has allowed them to grow in confidence through trialling creative, open-ended approaches to teaching and learning.
- Development of skills in using the interactive whiteboard.
- Development of speaking and listening techniques through the use of drama.
- Been fully involved in using research to inform practice.
- Support staff and teachers benefited from opportunity to work with artists and consultants.
- Y5 staff developed their capacity to embed ICT and other technology into their teaching.

### What CPD materials, research or expertise have you drawn on?

An evaluation report is prepared by the co-ordinator in each school where the results are analysed to measure the impact on standards. The Primary Strategy Advisor draws the six schools' final reports into the STAR Evaluation Report where a conclusive statement is made and overall impact is evaluated and reported on. Specialist arts expertise is provided by the artists and performers who are committed to the STAR Initiative and its aims and objectives.

Related National Strategies resources:

### Who provided you with support?

- External agency
- Middle leader
- Other
- Senior management
- Subject leader

### How were you supported?

The Consultant was supported by the Associate Advisor and the Primary Strategy advisor both of whom are leading the STAR initiative. A team of artists and performers also worked alongside the Consultant to support with the development of creative arts links to literacy.

## Impact

### What has been the overall impact on pupil learning?

The overall impact on pupil learning has been profound because in nearly all cases, STAR has effectively changed pupils' view about writing. They are now more confident and this has had a positive effect on their approach to literacy and because of the creative context, many of the boys who had previously commented on their dislike of writing, now reported that they enjoyed writing.

Quotes from the writing perceptions survey from the target group of pupils before the STAR initiative: Writing is boring.

Quotes from the writing perceptions survey from the target group of pupils after the STAR initiative: "I can now make my writing action packed." "I like writing stories because you can be really imaginative."

### Thoughts you think are relevant to overall impact on learning

Because a target group of children were tracked, staff were not only focused on developing the arts links with writing, but the impact of the initiative was monitored on a regular basis.

### Quotes you think are relevant to overall impact on learning

"Another change that was prompted was the length of time spent on a piece of work; working thematically encouraged flexibility in terms of the length of a unit and predetermined 'end point'. A detailed start gave way to a more open ended approach, where pupils themselves would determine the direction the learning took."

"Effective teaching and learning strategies used to encourage children to become more creative through writing and speaking and listening in whole class and group sessions."

"The increased staff motivation and confidence has had a direct impact on the attitude and motivation of the pupils towards writing, and on their behaviour, which has improved since the launch of the project."

### Quantitative evidence of impact on pupil learning

- CVA data
- Data comparison of cohorts
- Periodic teacher assessment
- Test results

### Qualitative evidence of impact on pupil learning

- Learning walks / study visits
- Observation outcomes
- Pupil consultation data
- Pupils' work

### Describe the evidence of impact on pupil learning

All schools selected a target group for their action research and all have been able to demonstrate measurable improvement in writing skills. Some tracked movement in sub-levels, while others tracked the number of children reaching age-related expectations. Judgements were made from an evidence base of teacher assessments, test results, and evaluation of progress with curricular targets. As a result of the STAR experience in schools, test results in writing improved and in many cases children made more than the expected two sub-levels of progress during the year.

## What has been the impact on teaching?

The impact on teaching can be summed up in quotes by the staff involved in the STAR initiative.

Quotes from the report:

"The project has allowed the staff to learn from fellow professionals and to discuss ways forward to make future developments and improvements."

"This approach linked with the introduction of the new Primary Framework for Literacy, being successfully trialled in year 3, and provided evidence those longer units of work resulted in a higher standard of writing as the outcome."

"Approaches to teaching and learning have changed as the project has progressed and staff have become more confident with different teaching methods and less driven by making sure there is written evidence of each stage in the process."

"Staff enthusiasm and motivation has grown with the project and they have adopted different approaches to teaching and learning."

"Use of visits solely as a stimulus for writing spread beyond the Year Group involved in the project."

## Quotes you think are relevant to the impact on teaching

Anlaby Junior - "The writing "buzz" in school at the moment is infectious." "The principles of the STAR initiative are echoed in the new Primary Framework, allowing me to share successful examples of a more creative approach to writing in action with staff. We plan to share it with our Infant colleagues when we merge in September".

## Evidence of impact on teaching

- Evidence from observation and monitoring
- Evidence from planning
- Improvements in curriculum documentation
- Teacher perceptions

## Describe the evidence of impact on teaching

The impact on teaching could be seen in many different ways from teachers becoming more confident in delivering skills in literacy, such as modelled writing, to developing cross curricular links. Staff also became much more confident in linking the arts with writing and began to think "outside of the box".

## What has been the impact on school organisation and leadership?

The impact has been that all of the schools involved intend to adopt the aims of the STAR initiative and therefore this will have a long term effect on learning and teaching.

## Evidence of impact on school organisation and leadership

The impact could be seen in the enthusiasm displayed at review meetings by the school leadership team about the STAR initiative and a willingness to incorporate the aims into the planning for the following year. A quote from one of the evaluation reports is as follows: "The Star initiative created a positive attitude to writing throughout the school. It has emphasised a more flexible approach to the primary curriculum. The approach taken by the Star initiative has helped to develop cross-curricular links and also supported teachers with planning more freely and

creatively."

## Summary

### What is the crucial thing that made the difference?

The commitment to the STAR Initiative by the artists and of the staff involved. Also for the Consultant and Advisor to be able to work together with artists and staff as a team.

### What key resources would people who want to learn from your experience need access to?

- primary strategy framework
- artists and performers.

### What CPD session and resources were particularly useful?

- Primary strategy framework
- Artists and performers.

### If another individual or school was attempting to replicate this work, where would they start and what would the essential elements be?

- Analysis of English test results
- Plan cross curricular links with the arts
- Primary strategy framework for literacy
- Curricular targets
- A list of artists and performers
- STAR co-ordinator in every school
- Support from the local authority
- Target groups of children
- Tracking.

Look at the related information which has been uploaded onto the case study for full details from some of the schools in the STAR initiative.

An evaluation carried out by the Primary Strategy advisor

- The STAR evaluation report 2006-7
- The STAR evaluation report 2007-8.

The following are some of the case studies carried out by the STAR initiative schools

- Anlaby junior outcomes of action research
- Anlaby junior evaluation of the STAR initiative
- Anlaby Acre Heads evaluation, action research and report
- Brough Primary evaluation of the STAR initiative
- Hornsea Burton Primary evaluation of the STAR initiative
- Kilham Primary evaluation of the STAR initiative.

### What further developments are you planning to do (or would you like to see others do)?

The further development has been to continue the STAR initiative in other schools. Therefore the aims of the STAR initiative are gradually being developed in the East Riding of Yorkshire.

## Supplementary Materials

This report is accompanied in the library by the following supplementary material:

- Anlaby Junior outcomes of action research
- Anlaby Acre outcomes of action research
- Anlaby Acre Heads evaluation, action research and report
- Hornsea Burton Primary evaluation of the STAR initiative
- Kilham Primary evaluation of the STAR initiative
- The STAR evaluation report for the year 2006-7
- The STAR evaluation report for the year 2007-8
- Brough Primary evaluation of the STAR initiative

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## About 'What Works Well'

This case study was originally published as part of the 'What Works Well' section of the National Strategies for Education in England. The National Strategies were professional programmes aiming for improvements in the quality of learning and teaching in schools in England. 'What Works Well' involved teaching practitioners from all phases and areas of education sharing accounts of real developments which had improved learning and teaching, and made a difference to pupil progress. 'What Works Well' case studies were designed to support practice transfer and include sufficient detail and resources to enable others to implement the effective practice described. They were reviewed by experts prior to publication as 'User Generated Content' (UGC) under a licence which encouraged reuse and derivative works, but which precluded commercial use.

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