



CASE STUDY REPORT

Improving text cohesion and structure to accelerate progress in Year 3 and Year 4 (ECaW)

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This study was originally published in 2010 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 support three schools and six teachers in accelerating pupil progress in writing, focusing specifically on improving the children's text cohesion and structure.

Aims: The main aim of the 'Every Child a Writer' project is to ensure faster progress in writing at the beginning of key stage two and two levels progress across the key stage by improving quality first whole class teaching, guided writing, and 1:1 tuition.

Methods: The participants in the Every Child a Writer project were six teachers from three schools, a local authority staff, a school leader, and a Primary National Strategy Consultant. Methods used included using APP grids to identify gaps in learning, personalizing teaching sequences, using guided writing to target specific areas, and using quality resources including texts.

Findings: The main findings of the Every Child a Writer project are that the use of APP grids to identify gaps in learning, personalised teaching sequences, guided writing sessions, and quality resources have all had a positive impact on pupil learning, teaching, and school organisation and leadership.

Implications: The findings of the Every Child a Writer project suggest that using APP grids to identify gaps in learning, personalizing teaching sequences, and using guided writing to target specific areas can help accelerate pupil progress in writing.

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?

Nationally, across Year 3 and Year 4, pupil progress plateaus. What the 'Every Child a Writer' project (ECaW) aims to do is to ensure faster progress in writing at the beginning of key stage two and also two levels progress across the key stage. There are various ECaW principles to help accelerate progress and these include: improving quality first whole class teaching, improving guided writing to meet group needs and providing 1:1 tuition for the children who need it most.

By working on Nottinghamshire's Leading Teacher team as part of ECaW, I supported three schools (one of these was my own) and six teachers, who were working in Year 3 and Year 4, to accelerate pupil progress. It soon became apparent that text cohesion and structure was an area of writing that the children in these classes were finding most difficult and was a gap that needed addressing in order for them to make further progress. Therefore, over the course of the year, I supported the teachers in improving quality first whole class teaching, improving guided writing to meet group needs and providing 1:1 tuition, focusing specifically on improving the children's text cohesion and structure.

Who might find this case study useful?

- Headteacher
- Middle leader
- 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?

The teachers whom I was supporting were not that confident in the teaching of writing. So, improvements needed to be made in terms of quality first whole class teaching and guided writing.

Text cohesion and structure were identified as 'gaps' in the pupils' learning and were the 'sticking points' or barriers to further progress. So over the year, we looked at the following areas in the teaching of writing, with text cohesion and structure at the fore-front of our minds:

- Use of APP materials to identify gaps in learning (text cohesion and structure) and identify writing targets
- Personalisation of teaching sequences - smarter planning, linked to specific gaps in learning.
- Use of guided writing to target specific areas, which were text cohesion and structure.
- Use of quality resources including texts.

What were your success criteria?

- By the end of the autumn term 50% of pupils to make 1 sub-level improvement in writing
- By the end of the spring term 100% of pupils to make 1 sub-level improvement in writing (except children with SEN)
- The children were struggling with text cohesion and structure and so their particular targets were as follows:
To use a range of connectives to link ideas together
To organise ideas into sections or

paragraphs, with related points sequenced logically

- To use a range of connectives to link ideas together
- To organise ideas into sections or paragraphs, with related points sequenced logically
- Once the above were secure, by the end of the year: To make links between paragraphs
- To make links between paragraphs

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

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

Describe the CPD approaches you used

Lesson observations were carried out at the beginning of the support, which helped to identify how the children in the supported classes were learning and identify areas for development. I then supported the teachers by coaching and modelling effective practice. Collaborative assessment, planning and reflection upon practice using 'learning conversations' were very powerful. These learning conversations were perhaps one of the most valuable approaches in helping to move on teachers' development in the teaching of writing. Team teaching was also used to deliver guided writing sessions where I might demonstrate the teaching of a particular skill.

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

There were lots of materials that we used across the year, which were very helpful in improving quality first whole class teaching and guided writing. They gave specific support in the area of text cohesion and structure. These were:

Who provided you with support?

- Local authority staff
- School leader

How were you supported?

- External agency
- Leading Teacher National ECaw CPD (summer term and autumn term 2009; spring and summer term 2010)
- ECaw Leading Teacher Review Meetings with Primary National Strategy Consultant (autumn term 2009, spring and summer term 2010)
- The Headteacher was fully involved.

Impact

What has been the overall impact on pupil learning?

- The children's confidence to write has increased.
- The children have a greater knowledge of how to improve their writing.
- The children have a greater understanding and more control over creating texts with good structure and cohesion. They now use a range of connectives to link ideas together and organise their ideas into sections or well developed paragraphs, with related points sequenced logically.
- Some children are making links between paragraphs too. Evidence of this can be seen in the 'Examples of children's work', attached below.

- All schools recorded improved mini-level improvements for the majority of the pupils in the identified cohort.

Thoughts you think are relevant to overall impact on learning

There were five main ECaW principles that are most relevant to the overall impact on learning. These were:

- Use of APP to identify gaps in learning and identify writing targets;
- Planning 'smarter' based on using units from the Primary Framework but amending these in light of the children's 'gaps' in learning.
- Guided writing/learning sessions (with a focus on text cohesion and structure, as well as supporting groups of children in meeting the intended outcomes but again, taking into account the 'gaps' of text cohesion and structure)
- 1:1 tuition sessions linked to the pupils' writing targets built upon and supported the work done within the units of work and guided writing sessions.
- Use of 'learning conversations' to reflect on and develop effective practice.

Quotes you think are relevant to overall impact on learning

- "I've found your time so valuable. We've had the time to talk ideas through and reflect upon practice, as well as bounce ideas off of one-another. I feel so much more confident in planning a unit of work that is specific to pupil needs." (Year 3 teacher)
- "The thing that has made the most difference is using the APP grids to highlight the gaps in learning." (Year 3/4 teacher)
- "The guided writing sessions have really improved the children's writing, as they are now much more focused." (Year 4 teacher)

Quantitative evidence of impact on pupil learning

- Data comparison of cohorts
- Periodic teacher assessment

Qualitative evidence of impact on pupil learning

- Observation outcomes
- Pupils' work

Describe the evidence of impact on pupil learning

The children's writing shows that they now use a range of connectives to link ideas together and they organise ideas into sections or paragraphs, with related points sequenced logically. They now make more links between their paragraphs. They also edit their work more without being prompted to do so, and make improvements based on the skills above.

APP backed up teachers' judgements that text cohesion and structure had improved, as almost all children achieved well in this aspect of teacher assessment.

The pupil progress data and data comparison of cohorts all show good progress. In two of the supported schools in particular, the data shows excellent progress, when compared with Nottinghamshire and all other ECaW LAs' data. The pupil progress data is based on APP and Optional Test results.

What has been the impact on teaching?

Work scrutiny and professional dialogue has shown that there has been a great impact on the teaching of writing and the teachers are now more confident in teaching writing. Their subject knowledge has improved. Sequences of work are now much longer, with more time set for planning and editing work. Units are also planned, with a focus on pupils' gaps in learning and group writing targets. Speaking and listening, cross-curricular, Talk for Writing and drama approaches are now used more readily.

Teachers are now much more confident in using APP to assess pupils' writing and identify gaps in learning and set appropriate targets. These judgements are at the fore-front of teachers' minds when planning units of work and guided writing sessions. Guided writing is now happening for focused groups, which is accelerating pupil progress.

The supported teachers are now accessing useful materials from the National Strategies website and using these to inform their planning.

Quotes you think are relevant to the impact on teaching

"I actually enjoying teaching Literacy now and enjoy planning it in my year group team." (Year 3 teacher)

"I know see how APP fits into the cycle: APP to assess and set targets, guided writing sessions to move learning forward, APP to assess and set new targets." (Year 4 teacher)

"Last year I was an NQT and didn't really enjoy teaching Literacy. I am now so much more confident planning a unit in a creative way & I enjoy teaching it too." (Year 3 / 4 Teacher)

Evidence of impact on teaching

- Evidence from observation and monitoring
- Evidence from planning
- Teacher perceptions

Describe the evidence of impact on teaching

At the end of the supported year, we reviewed the progress of the pupils, reflected on what the teachers have gained from the project and which practices they will continue to use next year. The teachers' perceptions highlighted that pupil progress had been accelerated and that the Support for Writing Materials were useful. They talked about how their sequences of work are now much longer, with more time set for planning and editing work. They are also planned, with a focus on pupils' gaps in learning and group writing targets. Speaking and listening, cross-curricular, Talk for Writing and drama approaches are now used more readily.

Teachers are now much more confident in using APP to assess pupils' writing and identify gaps in learning and set appropriate targets. These judgements are at the fore-front of teachers' minds when planning units of work and guided writing sessions. Guided writing is now happening for focused groups, which is accelerating pupil progress.

The evidence in planning and my own observations and monitoring from my visits into school also support this.

What has been the impact on school organisation and leadership?

- Staff meetings have been organised to ensure that the practices of ECaw are rolled out across other year groups, such as the use of the Support for Writing materials, effective use of APP and Guided Writing sessions.

- The literacy co-ordinators have been involved with this and policies have been amended.
- Use of APP to identify gaps in learning and set pupil writing targets are now being monitored across the schools.
- Leadership teams have used principles of APP as a focus for Performance Management observations e.g. the use of APP to ensure progress in writing.
- In the second ECaW year, one particular school has moved around staff members so that the principles of ECaW are rolled out and two new teachers will receive support through ECaW, one of these being the Literacy Coordinator.

Evidence of impact on school organisation and leadership

A more detailed assessment process (APP) which is central to accelerating pupil progress has challenged schools to review how they use assessment data. This has ensured that teachers identify not just raw levels but specific strengths as well as 'gaps' in learning to formulate targets, that will move their learning on. With this in mind, units of work are amended and guided writing sessions are planned for accordingly.

Summary

What is the crucial thing that made the difference?

- The enthusiasm and commitment of the teachers to engage with the project.
- The use of APP to ensure accurate teacher assessment, identify pupils' strengths and gaps in learning and set and track more appropriate writing targets
- Regular opportunities for the teachers to collaboratively plan and review approaches using 'learning conversations'.
- The support of the Head Teachers.

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

- The 'Support for Writing' materials
- The 'Talk for Writing' materials
- APP for writing grids
- Grammar for Writing publication
- The National Strategies Writer grids

What CPD session and resources were particularly useful?

As a starting point the APP grids should be used to identify pupil strengths and gaps in learning. Then the writer grids are very useful in helping the teacher to identify the next steps in learning, particularly for text structure and cohesion.

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

- Use of APP grids to identify pupil strengths and gaps in learning.
- Personalisation of teaching sequences - smarter planning, linked to specific gaps in learning.
- Use of guided writing to target specific areas, for example text cohesion and structure.
- Use of quality resources including texts.

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

To continue to roll out the principles and practices of ECaW, ensuring that guided writing continues to take place regularly for different groups of children based on their individual strengths and gaps in learning.

Supplementary Materials

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

- Planning examples showing Teaching Approaches
- Story Mountains to explore text structure
- Extracts from the 'Programme Log'
- Examples of Children's work
- ECaW Impact Measures Autumn & Spring term School A
- ECaW Impact Measures Autumn & Spring term School B
- ECaW Impact Measures Autumn & Spring term School C
- One school review document, evaluating the impact of the project

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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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