



CASE STUDY REPORT

Making good writers out of stuck/fallen behind 'can't write, won't write' pupils in Y6

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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 raise attainment and accelerate the progress of a group of Y6 pupils by using targeted teaching and CPD approaches, such as end of unit success-criteria, modelling, and a writing curriculum, to measure the impact on pupil learning and teaching.

Aims: The main aim was to raise attainment and accelerate the progress of a group of Y6 pupils by using targeted teaching and CPD approaches, such as modelling, open tasks, and peer and self-assessment, to improve their writing skills.

Methods: The participants in this case study are a headteacher, National Strategies consultant, senior leadership team, teacher, Y6 pupils, and their peers and self-assessors.

The methods used included targeted teaching with Assessing Pupils' Progress (APP) to identify next steps, joint planning and teaching with a consultant, modelling, setting up clear success criteria, and providing opportunities for direct teaching and practice of key skills/concepts/techniques. Pupils were also encouraged to use 'reader hat/writer hat' and 'paragraph signposts' to improve their writing.

Findings: The main findings are that targeted teaching and modelling of writing techniques, including open tasks, peer and self-assessment, and modelling without pre-composing, have resulted in accelerated progress for pupils, improved peer and self-assessment, increased confidence and enjoyment of writing, and improved results in writing and English tests.

Implications: The findings suggest that targeted teaching, effective modelling, and open-ended writing tasks can lead to accelerated progress, improved self-assessment, increased engagement and enjoyment of writing, as well as end of unit success-criteria. The teacher models writing without pre-composing it, and chooses what she models much more carefully. The writing curriculum in Y6 provides opportunities for direct teaching and practice of key skills/concepts/techniques, and allows pupils to explore an open task and apply their prior/recent learning.

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

Keywords: Primary education; Assessment and target setting; English - writing

Introduction

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

- To raise attainment and accelerate the progress of a group of Y6 pupils who were 'stuck' or had 'fallen behind' over KS2;
- To model good use of APP to facilitate very precise, targeted teaching;
- To model an alternative approach to the teaching of writing in Y6 – moving away from revision and test preparation and replacing it with high quality learning opportunities that enable pupils to learn, use and apply skills in open, meaningful, exciting writing tasks that will, by their very nature, also prepare pupils for end of Key Stage 2 writing tests.

Who might find this case study useful?

- Headteacher
- National Strategies consultant
- Senior leadership team (SLT)
- Teacher

Description

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

- Assessment and target setting
- English - writing

How did you intend to impact on pupil learning?

- To dramatically accelerate progress for pupils who essentially had made very little over three years of schooling;
- To facilitate target pupils in reaching level 4 at the end of KS2;
- To develop pupils' self-confidence and self-belief as learners and as writers in particular;
- To enhance pupils' engagement in the learning process via developing their involvement in the assessment process;
- To facilitate pupils in effectively using and applying prior learning.

What were your success criteria?

Main aims of the activity:

- School's KS2 English, reading and writing results at level 4+ to show improvement on 2009;
- School to close the gap between its reading and writing results at level 4+;
- School to move above the KS2 floor target;
- All targeted pupils to reach level 4 in writing and/or English by end of Y6 (KS2 test and teacher assessment data);
- All targeted pupils to make at least two levels progress from the end of KS1 – for all pupils this would mean making accelerated progress of at least 3 fine grades over the year; for most pupils, this would mean making accelerated progress of 4 fine grades over the year. (KS2 test and teacher assessment data);
- Pupils' self-assessment and self-evaluation would improve (evidenced through observation of pupils and discussion with them both during lessons and during target-related discussions, etc);
- Pupils' engagement, confidence and enjoyment of writing will improve (evidenced through pupil

discussions).

Secondary Aims of the activity:

- All targeted pupils to make 3 fine grades progress in writing during Y6, even if they do not manage to reach level 4/make two levels progress.

Milestones:

- By the end of the first narrative unit (November 2010), there would be good evidence that pupils in the target group would have secured all aspects of AF3 and AF4 at level 3;
- The teacher was aiming for the challenging target of one fine grade (sub-level) progress per half term. This was the only way that some of these target pupils would achieve level 4 in writing tests in May.

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

- Periodic teacher assessment
- Pupil consultation data
- Pupils' work
- Test results

Describe the CPD approaches you used

Targeted Teaching (including teacher subject-knowledge development):

- Used Assessing Pupils' Progress (APP) to undertake assessment of target pupils' writing over the first half of the autumn term;
- Identified AF3 and 4 as key areas to develop in the first instance so that the pupils could give some shape and structure to their writing. The key focus in the next unit would be to develop paragraphing, in particular the transitions between paragraphs;
- Consultant supported the teacher with the idea of using 'signposts' to paragraph writing. These 'signposts' are words or phrases that signal to the reader the point behind the change of paragraph as follows (NB: Some are more specific to narrative, some to non-narrative): Change of time; Change of place; Change of mood; Change of viewpoint; Change of speaker (dialogue); Change of subject (esp non-fiction writing)
 - Change of time;
 - Change of place;
 - Change of mood;
 - Change of viewpoint;
 - Change of speaker (dialogue);
 - Change of subject (esp non-fiction writing)
- Planning CPD for all staff aimed at focusing teachers onto the needs of all groups of learners when designing literacy units/adapting Framework examples for their classes – use of APP and Progression documents to facilitate appropriate levels of expectation.

Who provided you with support?

- Local authority staff

How were you supported?

- Consultant modelling of how to use APP as a tool for identifying next steps and strategically targeting them, setting clear milestones for success, e.g. securing level 3 statements before focusing on level 4;
- Joint planning: Consultant suggesting ways of teaching the key elements within the targeted areas as well as supporting the teacher in the effective planning of a unit. Consultant guiding the teacher through the process of setting up the 'Reader Hat/Writer Hat' model with her class, including teaching assistants. Consultant supporting the teacher in developing the learning environment – making best use of working walls to support the targeted areas of learning. Guiding the teacher through the process of planning units of 'open ended writing tasks'. Setting up email links so that planning can be shared and discussed 'on-line' during a unit if necessary; Regular meetings to discuss progress and plan next steps.
- Consultant suggesting ways of teaching the key elements within the targeted areas as well as supporting the teacher in the effective planning of a unit.
- Consultant guiding the teacher through the process of setting up the 'Reader Hat/Writer Hat' model with her class, including teaching assistants
- Consultant supporting the teacher in developing the learning environment – making best use of working walls to support the targeted areas of learning.
- Guiding the teacher through the process of planning units of 'open ended writing tasks'.
- Setting up email links so that planning can be shared and discussed 'on-line' during a unit if necessary;
- Regular meetings to discuss progress and plan next steps.
- Joint Teaching: Consultant demonstration of effective modelled writing techniques; Consultant working alongside guided groups to facilitate good progress within a lesson.
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Impact

What has been the overall impact on pupil learning?

- Accelerated progress is evident in all pupils when measured via teacher assessment. It is evident in most pupils when measured via the writing test.
- Half of the pupils in the group reached level 4 in writing and the majority of them reached level 4 in English overall, despite 80% of them starting the year at high level 2 in writing.
- Significantly improved peer and self-assessment.
- Significantly improved use and application of prior learning and of skills modelled by the teacher

Thoughts you think are relevant to overall impact on learning

Pupil learning: In order for the children to become more active in their learning they had to achieve success a 'chunk' at a time. The fact that the unit worked in this way led them to being more confident and therefore more willing to take risks because they could recognise their own success whilst being clear of the expected outcome.

Quotes you think are relevant to overall impact on learning

"When I write now I think about what questions my 'reader's hat' will ask about my writing." (Y6 Pupil, Dec 09)

"I have learned how to use 'paragraph signposts' to organise my writing." (Y6 Pupil, Dec 09)

"I have learned how good my writing can be!" (Y6 Pupil, Dec 09)

Quantitative evidence of impact on pupil learning

- Data comparison of cohorts
- Periodic teacher assessment

Qualitative evidence of impact on pupil learning

- Observation outcomes
- Pupil consultation data
- Pupils' work

Describe the evidence of impact on pupil learning

Quantitative Data summary:

1. Starting Points:

- 8 pupils started the year at high level 2 in writing. Of these, 6 pupils had been graded at level 2 at the end of KS1 and 1 had no end of KS1 result and has EAL. 3 of these pupils had recorded 1 fine grade progress in 3 years since end of KS1;
- 2 pupils started the year at low level 3 in writing. 1 pupil had been graded at low level 2 at the end of KS1 and the other had no KS1 result and has EAL.

2. Results (whole cohort):

- School has improved by 14 percentage points (ppts) on its 2009 result at Level 4+ in English and maths combined but remains below floor target;
- School has improved by 6 ppts on its 2009 English results at level 4+;
- School has improved by 19 ppts on its 2009 result at level 4+ in writing, achieving its second highest KS2 writing result since 2005;
- School has improved by 4 ppts on its 2009 result at level 4+ in reading;
- The gap between results at level 4+ in reading and writing has reduced by 15 ppts since 2009 and is at its lowest since 2005;

Results (target pupils):

- 4/8 (2 pupils had no KS1 result) pupils made 2 levels progress in writing when measured by the test and by teacher assessment, although a further 2 pupils were 1 or 2 marks away from a level 4 which would have given them the two levels progress;
- 6/10 pupils made at least 1 full level progress (3+ fine grades) over the year in writing according to the test; One further pupil was 1 mark away from level 4 which would have given him a full level progress over the year;
- 10/10 pupils made at least 1 full level progress over the year in writing according to teacher assessment;
- 5/10 pupils reached level 4 in writing according to the test, but a further 2 pupils were 1 mark away from level 4 and a further 1 pupil was 2 marks away from level 4;
- 5/10 pupils reached level 4 in writing according to teacher assessment. All remaining pupils reached high level 3;
- 6/10 pupils reached level 4 in English according to the test;
- 7/10 pupils reached level 4 in English according to teacher assessment. Of these, 3 were graded as secure level 4;

Given the very low starting point of so many of the target pupils, this represents clear impact on attainment and progress for most of them. However, for some pupils, even with the improvements to provision and their own engagement with learning, there was simply too far to go in too little time. Also, the significant improvements since 2009 in writing and in the reading/writing gap provide clear evidence for impact on the cohort as a whole.

Qualitative Summary (evidence via observation of pupils in class and via discussion with them):

- The pupils now have very clearly defined and very active role within the modelling process. The key questions/prompts are also used by the pupils when writing their own success-criteria and when self and/or peer marking. Also, pupils can increasingly see the compositional process unfolding via the model and recognise how they might take a similar approach when they write independently;
- As a result of this, pupils can succeed within the tasks. Also, because they know what the success-criteria really mean, they are able to evaluate their own success and that of their peers. This facilitates application of these skills throughout each literacy unit and beyond. They can also talk about their own and others' learning and suggest how improvements might be made;
- The pupils now have a mantra of 'What do I already know?' They use this every time they begin a task to help them to make sure that they use and apply their skills appropriately;
- The pupils had been underperforming for years and they recognised that fact. As a result, their confidence and self-belief had taken a very significant knock. Through achieving clear success within these focused sessions, they have gradually come to realise that they can be successful and have begun to take more risks when working independently. They also come to tasks with a much more positive frame of mind;
- The pupils have begun to enjoy some of the writing tasks, with the unit outcomes reflecting that enjoyment in terms of quality.

What has been the impact on teaching?

- Teaching is targeted at what pupils actually need to learn rather than broad coverage of the whole Y6 curriculum and everything else they have 'missed' in previous years;
- Modelling is effective and interactive;
- The writing curriculum has been 'opened up' giving pupils opportunities to apply prior learning and prepare sensibly for tests within exciting, relevant, high quality learning opportunities.

Quotes you think are relevant to the impact on teaching

Teacher learning: 'The support I was given from the ISP consultant gave me the confidence to take a risk and completely change my approach; particularly in how pupils were 'prepared' for the tests, which resulted in children becoming more engaged writers.

'Before, we were using APP as an assessment tool rather than a planning tool. Now we use the APP guidelines to plan next steps in learning in Literacy and Numeracy.' (Y6 Teacher)

"Before we started this work, the teacher wasn't doing anything different to a lot of our Y6 teachers – trying to ensure that they had covered everything they might conceivably need for their tests and practising for them. Now, she looks at it differently and targets her teaching at what the groups of pupils really need to learn and she ensures that they focus on how to effectively apply their prior learning to a whole variety of tasks. She really empowers the pupils to show what they can do and they respond in kind." (ISP Consultant)

Evidence of impact on teaching

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

Describe the evidence of impact on teaching

Targeted Teaching:

- The teacher has moved away from her traditional Y6 model of coverage of Framework units, revision of all text-types and test preparation and has developed the process of using assessment (via APP) to inform planning and teaching, using the Framework units and support materials where they will facilitate her teaching/pupils' learning.
- APP is now being used to inform planning and teaching across the school
- The teacher sets up very clear success-criteria with her pupils. This includes daily lesson criteria as well as end of unit success-criteria. Her lessons provide pupils with opportunities to achieve both daily and end of unit success-criteria and provide time for pupils to undertake effective peer and self-assessment of the success-criteria.

Modelling:

- The teacher now uses modelling much more effectively as a key teaching tool. She now models writing without pre-composing it.
- The teacher also models less text in each session, but chooses what she models much more carefully. Because the modelling is more focused and is of higher quality, the pupils are able to use and apply the model far more effectively.

The Writing Curriculum in Y6:

- The teacher now sets up units of learning that require pupils to explore an open task and to apply their prior/recent learning. These tasks also provide opportunities for direct teaching and practice of key skills/concepts/techniques identified from APP assessment. The tasks may not be as 'text-type-specific' as some Framework units, but, instead they offer pupils the opportunity to identify what the key purpose of the finished writing would be, who the audience might be (real and imagined) and how their prior knowledge of text-types and genre as well as key techniques around structure, organisation, etc, might be applied to create a text that fulfils the requirements of the task.
- The teacher trains the pupils to apply the same processes to end of KS2 test papers (both a limited number of practice tests and the 'real thing') In this way, the whole writing curriculum fulfils both the aim of high-quality, engaging, relevant learning opportunities but at the same time supporting test preparation in a more appropriate way.

What has been the impact on school organisation and leadership?

The school now uses the 5-point planning cycle across literacy and maths. All staff now create literacy unit overviews detailing expected outcomes/specific targeted teaching of skills, etc, for key groups of pupils, plus a brief overview of each of the three/four phases within each literacy unit.

Staff have a much clearer understanding of what attainment looks like at each level as a result of using APP within the planning cycle. This is therefore providing all pupils with more appropriate levels of challenge on a daily basis.

In addition, there is some evidence of greater consistency across the school in terms of pupils working at particular levels. Moderation of assessments in the next school year should provide further evidence of this.

Evidence of impact on school organisation and leadership

- The whole school has begun to use APP to inform learning and teaching as well as to provide indication of levels achieved within writing and numeracy, with the aim of embedding this practice in both areas in 2010-11
- All staff are expected to use the guidance from planning CPD when designing literacy units for their classes
- All teachers are now expected to undertake focused guided writing sessions with groups of pupils, using targets identified via APP assessment. These groupings are flexible and are entirely dependent on the needs of the pupils
- Subject leaders look for evidence of APP assessment informing learning & teaching when undertaking monitoring activities such as lesson observation and work/planning scrutiny

Summary

What is the crucial thing that made the difference?

Effective partnership working:

- The school's Headteacher was extremely supportive of the work being done as part of the year's ISP support allocation.
- The teacher was very open to undertaking the work and made sure that she went the extra mile in following up each meeting and undertaking recommended actions.
- The LA's model for ISP meant that there was enough flexibility in the work plan to allow the consultant to 'block' the various support sessions to fit into the appropriate timescale – doing the right thing, in the right place, at the right time.

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

- APP writing grids
- Literacy Progression Papers
- Support for Writing materials
- Guided Learning CPD resources (Peterborough)

What CPD session and resources were particularly useful?

- Guided Writing CPD
- Using APP to facilitate targeted teaching
- Planning CPD

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

Where should they start:

- Identify a target group of pupils who need to accelerate progress in order to reach end of year expectations in writing (or any other subject, as the messages are transferable).
- Ensure that teachers' understanding of APP is secure in the subject chosen.

Essential elements to include:

- Use of APP to target key Assessment Foci;
- Success-criteria – ensure that pupils know what success looks like for them over the course of each unit/block of learning and include the pupils in the identification and evaluation of those success-criteria;
- Effective scaffolding via the working wall/learning environment;
- Ensure that the units planned are based on what assessments tell you rather than simply following the Y6 Framework units;
- Set up ‘open’ writing units where the focus is on responding to the requirements of a task via application of what pupils already know and what they have recently been learning/practising. Ensure that pupils are focused more on how to meet the task requirements for the identified audience and less on worrying about what genre it fits into.

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

Peterborough LA are planning to introduce elements of this model in a number of other ISP schools in 2010-2011. In particular, ensuring that APP assessment drives high-quality teaching provision (including effective guided learning) as well as the ‘opening up’ of the writing curriculum in Y6, as we firmly believe that good ‘quality-first teaching’ throughout Y6 is far better and much more effective than a test-driven ‘revision’ curriculum.

Supplementary Materials

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

- Sample Y6 Writing Guidance Scaffold
- Sample Y6 Writing Guidance Scaffold as a pdf
- Reader’s Hat Working Wall Prompt
- Working Wall Paragraph Signposts
- Paragraphing Writing
- Model text: Idea development within a paragraph
- Alison Moat Y6 Literacy Unit: The piano
- Alison Moat Y6 Revision Units Planning Support Grid
- Alison Moat Y6 Literacy Unit The Piano
- Guided Learning Handout
- Guided Learning presentation Part 1
- Guided learning presentation part 2 Guided Writing
- Planning CPD presentation
- Planning CPD handouts
- Planning Process flow chart.
- Planning Process flow chart as a pdf
- Blank Literacy Unit Planning overview
- Target pupils data table
- Child 3 Examples of work Sept 09 - March 10
- Child 8 Examples of work Sept 09 - March10

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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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