



CASE STUDY REPORT

Improving writing: Working with Year 6 teachers to share good practice

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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 use the APP process and lesson study approach to improve writing in Year 6 pupils, with the aim of increasing attainment in literacy at Key Stage 2.

Aims: The main aim of the project was to use the APP process and lesson study approach to improve writing in targeted pupils, with the goal of helping them attain Level 4 at the end of Key Stage 2.

Methods: The participants in the Leading Teacher Project were Year 6 teachers, Headteachers, Middle Leaders, National Strategies consultants, Senior Leadership Teams, SIPs, Subject Leaders, and Teachers. Methods used included training, visits to partner schools, cluster meetings, use of APP process, lesson study approach, teacher assessment, pupil work, and test results.

Findings: The main findings of the case study are that the Leading Teacher project had a positive impact on pupil learning, with increased attainment in those pupils who received support, and improved attitudes towards writing. Teachers involved in the project gained experience in using APP and shared resources and ideas for effective writing.

Implications: The findings suggest that providing funding and support for CPD, such as the Leading Teacher Project, can have a positive impact on pupil learning, teacher confidence, and school organisation and leadership.

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Keywords: Primary education; English - writing

Introduction

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

As a Year 6 teacher involved in the Assessing Pupils' Progress (APP) Pathfinder project in Nottinghamshire, I was asked if I would consider supporting other Year 6 teachers in a leading teacher project aimed at raising attainment in literacy and mathematics at Key Stage 2. I chose to support in literacy, the focus being guided writing.

Who might find this case study useful?

- 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?

- Use the APP process to identify areas for improvement in writing (with particular attention to Assessment Focuses 3,4,5 and 6).
- Use the lesson study approach to work with partner teacher in the use of guided writing to support targeted pupils, at risk of not attaining level 4 at the end of Key Stage 2.

What were your success criteria?

- Pupils: Improvement in target pupils' writing in identified areas of Assessment Focus 3,4,5 and 6
- Teacher: Increased range of strategies to support pupils to improve writing

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

- Periodic teacher assessment
- Pupils' work
- Test results

Describe the CPD approaches you used

The Leading Teacher Project for Year 6 in Nottinghamshire followed a fairly structured approach, consisting of initial training, followed by visits to partner schools and cluster meetings. Four cluster meetings, for Leading and Partner teachers from a small group of schools (eight) were set up. These took place at different schools each time, so that we all had chance to see different learning environments. (A time line for visits to partner schools, with cluster meetings in between was given to all schools, with suggested programmes for both visits and meetings; there was some flexibility with dates and content).

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

Primary Strategy literacy units

Jumpstart Literacy - Pie Corbett

Research into children's learning, eg The ALPs approach - Alastair Smith and Nicola Call; Brain Gym- Paul Dennison; Wise Up - Guy Claxton

Who provided you with support?

- External agency
- Senior management

How were you supported?

Nottinghamshire local authority (LA) Primary Strategy Team provided one day of training for Leading Teachers embarking on the project, during which we had opportunities to consider how to handle the role of 'coach' when working with other professionals. We took part in role plays, giving feedback to other teachers on their planning; discussed possible difficulties of supporting staff in other schools, who may not have asked to be involved, and looked at the most effective approaches. We were allocated our partner schools and then grouped together in clusters (by locations of schools). It was suggested that one person take on the role of Key Leading Teacher, who would take responsibility for chairing cluster meetings between visits to schools. The cluster meetings were intended to be an opportunity for Leading teachers and Partner teachers to meet together, discuss how the project was going, and share good practice and resources for writing. We could contact the Primary Literacy and Numeracy consultants for Nottinghamshire for support and advice throughout the project.

Impact

What has been the overall impact on pupil learning?

Pupils are more confident and adventurous writers. The amount of writing they were producing increased considerably. Some pupils attained Level 4, or high Level 3 in end of Key Stage 2 assessments.

Thoughts you think are relevant to overall impact on learning

There is no doubt that the small group of pupils who had two teachers working with them to improve their writing had a positive impact, even though the number of sessions was small. However, a larger number of pupils gained from a group of teachers sharing their expertise, in that all the teachers involved in the project, including Leading teachers, had to consider their own practice in some depth, and plan to achieve noticeable improvements in pupils' writing.

Quotes you think are relevant to overall impact on learning

- I like how we don't just have to write. We can talk about our ideas first. This helps me as I cannot think of anything to write at first!
- I remember when we used the whiteboards to write sentences about granny and her games console. I think that my ideas are normally rubbish but I wanted to read my sentences to the class. They were funny.

Quantitative evidence of impact on pupil learning

- CVA data
- Periodic teacher assessment
- Test results

Qualitative evidence of impact on pupil learning

- Logs or interviews
- Observation outcomes

Describe the evidence of impact on pupil learning

Key Stage 2 attainment data for Nottinghamshire for 2008 and 2009 shows the impact of the Leading Teacher project in writing. The data shows an increase in attainment in those pupils who received Leading Teacher support. In addition, pupils involved in the project at both schools, showed noticeable improvements in their attitudes towards writing. They were more motivated and engaged in learning, keen to share what they had learned with other pupils not involved in the project, and the quality of their writing was better. There was greater attention to detail, particularly with punctuation; better organisation and use of paragraphs and more variety in the types of sentences used.

What has been the impact on teaching?

Teachers involved in the project (both Leading and Partner teachers) have gained experience in using APP as an assessment tool, and have shared resources and ideas for effective writing that will have an impact on pupil learning in the future. Year 5 teachers have been involved in identifying target pupils for the following year, and discussing approaches that have worked well; this should also have an impact on future learning.

Quotes you think are relevant to the impact on teaching

As an NQT, I found the LTP to be a huge support. The meetings were about sharing ideas and resources, which were invaluable to me. I didn't feel judged and all of my suggestions about my own practice were welcomed by the group. This gave me a confidence boost, as I was new to the Year 6 role so it was nice to hear positive comments.

Evidence of impact on teaching

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

Describe the evidence of impact on teaching

My partner teacher was a Newly Qualified Teacher, who had taken over a Year Six class towards the end of the Autumn term. As she was the only Year Six teacher in the school, and was already trying to get to grips with all the other challenges that come with the particular year group, she found it very useful to work closely with another teacher, planning and delivering lessons together. She became more familiar with the APP process, and how to use it to inform future planning, and it helped my own understanding to go through the process again with pupils I had not previously taught. She was able to prioritise areas to work on for maximum impact.

What has been the impact on school organisation and leadership?

Opportunities for Year 5 and 6 teachers and teaching assistants to work together to plan transition programmes and interventions for pupils at risk of not attaining target levels will continue.

Evidence of impact on school organisation and leadership

Clear identification of vulnerable groups in class data for own school and supported school.

Planned programme of support to other schools in the use of APP as a tool (as part of the Nottinghamshire APP Pathfinder project).

Planned support to continue to develop lesson study approach to collaborative learning in both schools.

Summary

What is the crucial thing that made the difference?

Funding from the local authority allowed teachers to engage in relevant CPD within their own and other schools. The time this allowed for reflection and development was invaluable.

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

Local Authority funding and support for Leading Teacher programme

What CPD session and resources were particularly useful?

Training in the use of APP.

Initial training by Nottinghamshire Primary Strategy Team in coaching and mentoring adults.

Programme plan with structure for meetings.

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

Contact local authority (LA) advisers to find out about involvement in Leading teacher programme.

Use pupil assessment data to identify pupils at risk of not attaining required progress, and to track progress (Key Stage One data, NFER test results, Optional National Curriculum tests, etc.)

Use APP grids to identify areas of weakness for individual pupils.

Plan guided writing sessions to focus on those areas of weakness (working with colleagues and using a lesson study approach where funding allows).

Review progress against guidelines and adapt planning accordingly.

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

Use of the lesson study approach to share good practice in my own school.

Opportunities for networking with other teachers working in Upper Key Stage 2.

Supplementary Materials

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

- Ideas for teaching writing effectively
- Leading Teacher Programme Plan
- Year 6 writing results 2009

- Feedback from supported teacher

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