



CASE STUDY REPORT

Improving Boys' Writing Programme

Jo Lockley and Jessica Hackett

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 close the gap in attainment between boys and girls' writing in selected schools, and to develop teacher and subject leader expertise in order to increase schools' capacity to make and sustain improvement in writing.

Aims: The main aim of this development work was to close the gap in attainment between boys and girls' writing in selected schools, and to secure impact on KS2 results at the end of the academic year 2007-2008.

Methods: The participants included 15 teachers, Literacy Subject Leaders, Headteachers, Middle Leaders, National Strategies consultants, and Subject Leaders. They were supported by an external agency and provided with CPD materials, research, and expertise. Methods used included: tracking target group progress, using Primary Framework Literacy units, incorporating 10 steps for effective writing, using visual planning tools, teacher modelling, shared/guided writing, and Assessment for Learning.

Findings: The main findings of this case study are that the programme had a positive impact on pupil learning, teaching, and school organisation and leadership. It was found that explicit reference to purpose and audience, demystifying the writing process, teacher enthusiasm, and effective use of assessment for learning were crucial to making a difference.

Implications: The findings of this development work suggest that explicit reference to purpose and audience, demystifying the writing process, and teacher enthusiasm are crucial to improving children's attitudes and quality of writing. This has had a positive impact on school organisation and leadership.

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?

- To close the gap in attainment between boys and girls' writing in selected schools
- To secure impact on KS2 results at the end of academic year 2007-2008
- To develop teacher and subject leader expertise in order to increase schools capacity to make and sustain improvement in writing

Who might find this case study useful?

- Headteacher
- Middle leader
- National Strategies consultant
- 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?

We intended to impact on pupil learning through planning Literacy units of work from the Primary Framework which:

- Began with a stimulus to engage and motivate reluctant boy writers
- Followed the teaching sequence for writing driven by the 'ten steps for effective writing' (see attached document for details)- Worked collaboratively with the school and more specifically, year 6 teacher and subject leader and provided a series of INSET as well as school based support
- Tracked the progress of a target group of pupils in writing throughout the programme by analysing samples of their writing and eliciting next steps

What were your success criteria?

- Boys' attainment in writing is closer to that of girls
- Raised overall attainment in English for all pupils
- Teachers and subject leaders understand and use the teaching sequence to meet the needs of individual pupils
- Subject leaders are able to identify progress made and next steps that sustain and enhance improvement

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

- CVA data
- Logs or interviews
- Periodic teacher assessment
- Pupils' work
- Test results

Who provided you with support?

- External agency
- Middle leader
- Subject leader

How were you supported?

Each school was allocated a local authority Primary Strategy Literacy Consultant and subject leaders disseminated key messages given across the school through staff inset and individual year group support.

Impact

What has been the overall impact on pupil learning?

The impact on pupil learning was measured through qualitative and quantitative data. National curriculum levels for writing were recorded and tracked throughout the year and pupil and teacher interviews took place at the beginning and end of the project. Both showed a very positive impact overall on pupil attitudes to writing and, in the majority, the national assessment data backed this up. (See below for data)

Thoughts you think are relevant to overall impact on learning

The following show a variety of responses from the questionnaires:

"Progress was shown in the majority of the children in the target group."

"Composition and effect is much improved and there is now improved planning and better structures for writing are in place."

"Children no longer see writing as something to be feared."

"Above all, levels of enthusiasm have risen affecting other changes. The simple fact for most of them is that they believe that they can improve now, that they have the ability to write for a variety of audiences and purposes."

"Using film and going beyond the classroom grabbed all of the children's attention."

"80% of the target group are now on track".

"100% of pupils in target group made 2 or more level progress and 6 out of 9 children made three or more sub levels progress."

"Working walls really focused attention, children loved and used them, even when they were removed, children still looked at the place they had been on the wall."

Quotes you think are relevant to overall impact on learning

Quotes from pupil questionnaires: "I love Literacy in year 6!" "I now know how to make my writing better." "The reader wouldn't be interested in these words; how about these..." "I feel like I can write now, its not just stories." "I didn't think writing was good, now I like writing and I can write." "When I write I think about what I need to add to make my writing better."

Quantitative evidence of impact on pupil learning

- CVA data
- Periodic teacher assessment
- Test results

Qualitative evidence of impact on pupil learning

- Logs or interviews
- Pupils' work

Describe the evidence of impact on pupil learning

As the attached tables of results show, the majority of schools who took part in this programme demonstrated a good increase in the number of children achieving level 4s in both English overall and writing levels. There was also a significant increase in the number of boys attaining level 4+ in writing in 5 out of the 7 schools. Individual schools also demonstrated good sub-level progress with boys in their target group (see table for example school)

What has been the impact on teaching?

There were 15 teachers and Literacy Subject Leaders participating in this course and the impact on their teaching was wide-ranging. Different teachers adopted different strategies in accordance with the needs of their children and these included:

- Development of working walls
- Incorporation of the 'ten steps for effective writing' (see attached document) into their teaching-
Focus on pupils' attitudes to writing, including a focus on purpose and audience
- Development of teaching strategies for writing including shared and guided writing and the importance of teacher modelling
- Use of visual planning tools

During the programme, several teachers were observed by outside agencies including Ofsted and their practice was deemed as being good or better.

Evidence of impact on teaching

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

Describe the evidence of impact on teaching

As the data and quotes included in this report clearly show, the impact of this programme on the teaching has been significant. Throughout the programme, consultants aligned to the schools spent a significant amount of time in school/classrooms, either observing the teaching, talking to children or working alongside the teachers and subject leaders to develop the analysis of writing, identification of next steps and subsequent planning to meet the needs of the children in the target group. By the end of the programme, it was clear in many of the schools that teachers were much more confident and effective in these processes and significant improvement could be seen in their analysis of writing and planning. This was most noticeable in the teachers development of targeted and focused guided writing sessions to accelerate the children's learning. As mentioned previously, these guided sessions were planned collaboratively and modelled by the consultant who then observed the teachers guided writing session in order to measure impact. Observations revealed that by the end of the programme, the quality of the teaching of guided writing by many of the teachers was much improved. Where Ofsted inspections had taken place, the quality of the teaching overall was reflected by judgements made.

What has been the impact on school organisation and leadership?

The impact of this programme on the whole school has been particularly noticeable in the following areas: The ten steps for effective writing have been disseminated across the school and are now being used by all year groups. There is now a greater understanding of the effective use of visual planning tools (Sue Palmer) and there is now much more consideration of how to use working walls effectively. The Literacy Subject Leaders are now working more widely across the whole school and one of the teachers involved in the programme is now becoming the Literacy Subject Leader in order to ensure the impact across the whole school. INSET has been carried out to disseminate messages and enthuse the staff.

Evidence of impact on school organisation and leadership

Headteachers and senior leadership members have recognised the impact of teaching strategies promoted through this programme in accelerating pupil progress. They then ensured that in-school or consultant support was accessed by other year groups. Evidence of progress as a result of this should be seen through this academic year.

Summary

What is the crucial thing that made the difference?

Having run this course for the past two years in schools in Leicester city, it has become clear that the following areas are crucial to making the difference to both the children's attitudes to writing, and the quality of their writing:

- Explicit reference to purpose and audience at all opportunities. This was a focus that was lacking before and now drives every piece of writing at every stage and children are never in doubt as to who or why they are writing for
- Demystifying the writing process through use of visual planning tools, teacher modelling and good quality, clearly focused, shared and guided writing which meets the needs of the children
- Use of working walls to exemplify the learning taking place, including a clear focus on sentence construction and composition and effect
- Teacher enthusiasm - seeing Literacy teaching as more fun and ensuring that the children are fully engaged and excited about the unit of work through use of a range of stimuli (film, drama, beyond the classroom, computer games)
- Effective use of Assessment for Learning and identifying next steps for writing

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

Digital cameras/Digi-blues

What CPD session and resources were particularly useful?

Course participants made the following comments about the most useful elements of CPD:

- Beyond the classroom - creating a unit on Journalistic writing: This was a good introduction to the course - the unit engaged children. The use of drama and working in role to focus the teaching of challenging genres such as journalistic writing was really useful. Doing the actual drama activities ourselves was invaluable - we loved doing it and it helped us to be confident that the children would. This session clarified the use of guided/shared/modelled writing - cleared up which was best to use in which context. Resources - digi-blue cameras
- Visual Literacy - planning a unit on Argument and Persuasion: The training on the techniques of

reading film such as the 3c's (colour, character, camera) and the 3s's (story, setting, sound) and sound imaging was really helpful and valuable as an introduction to using film. This was the most inspiring unit I have ever taught - both the children and I got so much out of itResources - Short films based on an issue to be explored(e.g Tom Sweep - a short animation about litter);BFI materials - Look Again - guide book to using film.

- Revision and MYST:Resources - Revision unit and visual planning tools, Myst 3 - saved games and images.

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

- Identify a target group of children who are working just below age-related expectation in writing - the progress of these children will be tracked through the year
- Start with pupil interviews and then repeat these regularly throughout the year
- A good knowledge of the children is needed in order to understand what will motivate them
- Set up a writing/working wall as a teaching aid and to support pupils in reflecting on and using their ideas within lessons
- Hold regular staff meetings with the teacher and subject leader in order to disseminate key messages - one per term is ideal in order to embed practice across the whole school
- Ensure the teaching sequence for writing is incorporated into Literacy units of work including shared and modelled writing and regular guided writing focused around the needs of the target group
- Be explicit about audience and purpose whenever children encounter writing in whatever subject
- Ensure that Assessment for Learning is embedded into the writing process

Supplementary Materials

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

- Plan for beyond the classroom
- Plan for Visual Literacy
- What is Myst?
- Tables of results
- 10 steps for effective writing
- Initial outcomes and objectives of programme

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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. Most 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. This report was awaiting final approval when the National Strategies site was archived.

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