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CASE STUDY REPORT

Differentiation and Guided Writing

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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 improve the quality of guided writing in 6 classrooms by introducing differentiated objectives, flexible groupings, and support for writing materials.

Aims: The main aim of this development work was to improve the quality of teaching and standards of guided writing in Years 3 and 4, with a focus on differentiated objectives and flexible groupings.

Methods: The participants in this case study are 6 teachers in Years 3 and 4, a Leading Teacher, a local ECaW consultant, and a Headteacher. Methods used include classroom observations, collaborative planning, staff meetings, use of support for writing materials, learning conversations, work scrutiny, and professional dialogue.

Findings: The main findings are that guided writing sessions are now taking place in all classes, with differentiated objectives and flexible groupings. Children are more confident writers and have improved attainment in writing. Teachers are more confident in their teaching of writing and have improved subject knowledge.

Implications: The findings suggest that providing teachers with the time and resources to focus on guided writing, as well as the use of support materials, can lead to improved outcomes for pupils in terms of their writing attainment and confidence.

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 teaching of guided writing has been identified as an area for development. I have been working as a Leading Teacher on the Every Child a Writer (ECaW) initiative since September 2009. The key priorities for Every Child a Writer are: improving quality first point teaching, developing standards in guided writing and implementing One to One tuition. As a leading teacher for ECaW, I have worked with 6 teachers in Years 3 and 4 in order to raise the standards of writing in their year 3 and year 4 classes. On my first few classroom visits to my supported schools, it became clear that the supported teachers were lacking confidence in the teaching of guided writing. Over the next year, the planning for and teaching of guided writing therefore became a focus for my visits.

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 key issues were that guided writing was not taking place in all classrooms and that, where it was taking place, there was very little evidence of differentiation.

What were your success criteria?

By the end of the year, guided writing sessions should be taking place in all of the classes I was supporting. All guided writing sessions should have differentiated objectives.

The groupings for guided writing ' should not be set in stone'. The organisation of groups should be flexible and should reflect the children's learning in lesson's that week. Eg - if 5 children from different groups suddenly struggle with paragraphs, then the following day, those 5 children should be grouped together to work on paragraphs. A helpful format when planning for guided writing is to have 3 sessions planned out in advance, leaving 2 spare sessions which you can fill up throughout the week with whoever requires support for specific objectives (The focus can be decided after work has been marked).

The teachers should be using the support for writing materials to support their teaching of guided writing.

Differentiation should be evident in all writing sessions.

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

- Observation outcomes
- Periodic teacher assessment

Describe the CPD approaches you used

At the beginning of the year, classroom observations were carried out by myself. From these observations, guided writing was identified as an area for development. In order to address this, I worked alongside my supported teachers to share organisational techniques for guided writing, and produce collaborative planning with a strong focus on a differentiated approach to the teaching of writing. In all of the supported schools, I have been asked to share the key messages for quality guided writing with the whole school during staff meetings. Consequently, the use of support for writing materials is now being rolled out across all year groups.

Many learning conversations took place relating to assessment with my supported teachers. We had many meetings where we assessed writing using APP. As their confidence with APP increased, my supported teachers also identified a lack of knowledge and consistency amongst their staff relating to APP. I therefore led a staff meeting for schools where inconsistencies were discussed and addressed in order to produce a whole school approach. Questions such as 'what constitutes 'some writing' in the APP descriptors?' were addressed. Once the school had agreed on their approach, I then worked with several groups of teachers from all year groups in order to moderate their writing assessments using APP.

Who provided you with support?

- Senior management

How were you supported?

I had the support of my headteacher who released me one day a week to work on the ECaW project. The initiative also had a greater impact in my supported schools when the head was driving the project forward throughout the whole school - eg asking supported teachers to feedback in meetings, asking me to lead whole school staff meetings, enabling staff to attend national training.

All the leading teachers on this project were also supported by a local EcaW consultant.

Impact

What has been the overall impact on pupil learning?

All schools reported improved outcomes for the majority of pupils in the cohort. The results in my supported schools exceeded the 'expected level of progress in writing' nationally. Obviously, percentages differed slightly between the three schools, but all three schools reported a significant increase in the number of children making 2 sub-levels of progress in writing. There was also an increase in the number of children achieving age related expectations in writing.

Thoughts you think are relevant to overall impact on learning

- Guided Writing now takes place in all classes.
- Guided writing sessions are now much more focused. Objectives are differentiated and suited to the children's needs. Groupings are far more flexible.
- Children are now able to take more responsibility for their learning. They are able to use support for writing materials in order to move their learning forwards when they are unsupported.
- Support For Writing materials (eg formats for all genres, key features of all genres, key questions relating to all genres) are being used within the supported classes. They are also being rolled out in other year groups. As a result, children's knowledge of all text types is also increasing.
- The children's attainment in writing has improved. End of year data is not yet available but clear

progress can be seen in the data returns so far.

- Children are becoming more confident writers. Evident during lesson observations and work scrutiny.

Quotes you think are relevant to overall impact on learning

In a lesson where the teacher had forgotten to give out key questions for children to use in independent writing, the child said - where are those questions that help me to know if I've remembered everything? The use of key questions for text types enables children to take responsibility for their own learning. It also releases the teacher to work solely with the guided group.

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

Work scrutiny and lesson observations show that writing lessons are differentiated. Different abilities have different formats for writing.

Children's independent work shows that they are making greater progress. There is clear progression in their writing. In discussions with pupils, they are also able to talk you through how writing sessions (independent or guided) are structured. They now expect to be given materials such as frames or formats in order to support them as they write.

Tracking shows that we have exceeded the expected level of progress in my school. The success criteria was for all children (except SEN) to make 1 sub-level of progress by the Spring term. We achieved this for all children (except SEN). In fact by the summer term, we had exceeded national expectations and had 56% of our Year 4 children making 2 or more sub-levels of progress.

What has been the impact on teaching?

Teachers are now more confident in their teaching of writing. They are using the support for writing materials in order to deliver differentiated writing sessions. Increased subject knowledge has led to much more focused planning and delivery of writing sessions.

Observations have shown that the teaching of writing has improved. Staff are now using more modelling which they are using to feed into their guided sessions. Guided sessions make use of support for writing materials.

Quotes you think are relevant to the impact on teaching

This new approach to guided writing has definitely raised the profile of writing at school! - Year 4 supported teacher

Writing lessons are much more fun! - Year 4 child

I can see where I'm heading now with my planning and teaching! - Year 3 supported teacher

I have shown other teachers at school how to plan like we do! - Year 4 supported teacher

Evidence of impact on teaching

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

Describe the evidence of impact on teaching

Work scrutiny, planning scrutiny and professional dialogue has shown that:

The teaching of writing has improved. Teachers have improved subject knowledge and are therefore more confident in their teaching of writing. Teachers are now delivering quality guided writing. They are now able to organise and plan for sessions where all children are learning at a level which is appropriate to them, regardless of whether or not they are being guided by an adult.

Writing sessions are now differentiated using the support for writing materials.

What has been the impact on school organisation and leadership?

- Staff meetings have been organised to ensure a consistent approach to the teaching of guided writing
- Staff meetings have been organised to ensure a consistent approach to the assessment of writing using APP
- The literacy co-ordinators have taken a lead and adapted their policies accordingly
- Leadership teams have made writing the focus for observations

Evidence of impact on school organisation and leadership

The leadership team are now aware of what makes a good guided writing session. They were unsure what they were looking for beforehand. Now they are aware of the criteria for a quality guided session, they can use this to offer advice to staff during work scrutiny or observations.

There is now an agreed recording method for APP which all staff follow and leaders are able to monitor.

Summary

What is the crucial thing that made the difference?

Having the time in school to share my knowledge of guided writing and APP.

Working with staff who are open to new ideas.

Giving examples of how I have used these approaches in my own classroom have helped. I have been able to explain how to organise the three way approach to guided writing. People are happier to take on board what you are saying if you can show that you are actually doing it yourself!

What CPD session and resources were particularly useful?

National Leading Teacher Training

Talk For Writing - Notts training

Support For Writing Materials

Leading Teacher Review Meetings

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

How to organise a Guided Writing Session:

- Model the organisation of planning for a guided writing session (which groups? when? Using APP for targets / objectives)

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

Continue to roll out the agreed approach for Guided Writing to new staff at the schools.

Supplementary Materials

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

- Example key questions for middle of table (discussions)
- Exemplar checklist (letter writing)
- Exemplar writing frame 1 (letter writing)
- Exemplar writing frame 2 (discussions)
- What is Guided Writing?
- ECaW analysis

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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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