



CASE STUDY REPORT

Storytelling through the Arts - Developing opportunities for literacy across the curriculum

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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 arts to enhance the storytelling approach and measure the impact on speaking, listening, and writing outcomes for pupils, with the aim of sharing the outcomes more widely throughout the cluster. The project also provided coaching support for other FS and KS1 colleagues, as well as KS2 colleagues, and the Headteacher provided time at staff meetings to share key outcomes with staff.

Aims: The main aim of the project was to use the arts to enhance the storytelling approach and measure the impact on speaking, listening, and writing outcomes for pupils, as well as to share project findings with other colleagues throughout the school and provide coaching support for teachers.

Methods: The participants included two teachers, the Headteacher, and other staff from the school and the local area. They shared experiences and findings of using storytelling as a teaching strategy to improve speaking, listening, and writing outcomes for children.

The methods used included training, modelling, learning conversations/coaching, collaborative enquiry/classroom enquiry, drawing on CPD materials, research, and expertise, and sharing project findings with other colleagues. The CPD approaches were used to measure progress towards success criteria and to measure the impact on pupil learning, with the Headteacher providing time at staff meetings to share key outcomes more widely with staff.

Findings: The main findings of the project were that storytelling can be used to improve speaking, listening and writing outcomes for children of all ages. Teachers shared their successes with each other and the wider school community, leading to greater confidence in their own abilities and a keen interest in using the arts as a vehicle for writing.

Implications: The findings of the project suggest that storytelling is an effective strategy for improving speaking, listening and writing outcomes for children of all ages. The project also highlighted the importance of collaborative learning experiences and professional learning conversations for successful implementation of the strategy.

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

Keywords: Primary education; Creativity; Art; Design and Technology; English - reading; English - speaking and listening; English - writing; Information and Communication Technology; Music; Drama

Introduction

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

Over the past four years, I have worked as part of the team of Primary English Consultants for North Yorkshire Local Authority. I have observed varied practice in the teaching of speaking, listening and writing. More recently, teachers have begun to focus on talk to develop writing, especially after the release of the Talk for Writing materials in 2008. Whilst many teachers incorporate opportunities for speaking and listening through group work, discussion and drama, I feel that there is still a need to develop Talk for Writing strategies as they can have a positive impact on learning on the classroom. The key to the successful application of the Talk for Writing strategies is a strong foundation of purposeful talk in the classroom and an ethos of collaboration.

In May 2008, I attended Pie Corbett's training on Talk for Writing. I was particularly interested in the use of the storytelling and 'storymaking' approach, which was exemplified as a key strategy in the training materials. As an outcome of this training, our Consultant team created a two-day course to launch the Talk for Writing materials across the County. Through this training, teachers had the opportunity to explore strategies for 'Reading with a writerly eye;' developing guided, shared and independent work; improving pupils' progress in writing and developing the storytelling and 'storymaking' strategy. A key feature of the course was the inclusion of a gap task whereby teachers had the opportunity to trial strategies in their own classrooms between Days 1 and 2 and to have the opportunity to discuss the outcomes with other teachers through reflection and feedback.

The Storytelling Through the Arts project was an outcome of this training. Project work focused on learning developed by two teachers at Broomfield School who attended the central training sessions in the 2008-2009 academic year. Both teachers selected storytelling and 'storymaking' as a key strategy to trial in their own classrooms, as part of the gap task.

As participants in the North Yorkshire Aspire Arts programme, the project provided a perfect opportunity to explore how the arts could be used as a vehicle for enhancing storytelling in both KS1 (Year 1/2) and lower KS2 (Year 3/4) class. As key priority of the Aspire programme was to develop a cross-art form project and to increase access to high quality arts activities for all children and young people, teachers used storytelling as the stimulus for developing this cross-curricular project. Additional arts funding was secured through the Aspire programme as teachers developed work through the life of the project.

Who might find this case study useful?

- Assistant headteacher
- Deputy headteacher
- Early years foundation stage practitioner
- Head of school improvement
- Headteacher
- LA adviser
- Leading teacher
- Middle leader
- National Strategies consultant
- School leader
- Senior leader
- Senior leadership team (SLT)
- SIP (School Improvement Partner)
- Subject leader
- Teacher

- Year group leader

Description

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

- Creativity
- Art
- Design and Technology
- English - reading
- English - speaking and listening
- English - writing
- Information and Communication Technology
- Music
- Drama

How did you intend to impact on pupil learning?

The purpose of the study was to use the arts to enhance the storytelling approach and to measure the impact on speaking, listening and writing outcomes for pupils. The teachers involved in the project designed creative, cross-curricular sequences of work using storytelling as a stimulus for writing. The intended impact on pupil learning was as follows:

- improved speaking, listening and writing outcomes;
- knowledge of basic story plot/ language;
- internalisation of familiar story structures;
- improving structure and language in writing and increased enthusiasm for writing.

In the Year 1/2 classroom, the teacher used Goldilocks and the Three Bears as the stimulus text for storytelling. To enhance an understanding of the story structure and language, the teacher set up the following opportunities to apply learning within the environment through the arts:

- Whole class storytelling of the stimulus text (imitation of known story with actions);
- Retelling a known story using finger puppets (drama);
- Creation of large story map to support retelling;
- 3 bears on a walk (role play outdoors);
- Hot seating of 3 bears after their walk (role play);
- Recount of the walk the bears took, in role;
- Listening to, remembering and performing the song 'When goldilocks went to the house of the bears' (Music);
- Visual learning journey display (Working Wall) to provide a prompt for pupil and peer assessment of next steps;
- Paired/ shared reading of other versions of 'Goldilocks and the Three Bears' stories;
- Creation of a 'Toy Workshop' to create a new teddy bear (art, design and technology, role play);
- Use of 2 Simple ICT programme to write new innovation of a known story (ICT);
- Map drawing of the route the bears took on their walk and innovation on the story setting;
- Wanted posters for Goldilocks;
- Planning and discussion of newly innovated story, based on 'Goldilocks and the three bears' story structure;
- Creation of story maps for newly innovated stories;

- Role play of innovated stories using various props in the small world play area;
- Oral storytelling of new, innovated stories;
- Writing a story based on 'Goldilocks and the three bears' (innovation/ invention).

The Year 3/4 teacher chose Dinosaurs and all that Rubbish as a stimulus text for storytelling. This book was chosen as a link to the 'Going Green' theme that was being explored through topic work. To enhance an understanding of the story structure and language, the teacher set up the following opportunities to apply learning within the environment through the arts:

- Whole class storytelling of the stimulus text (imitation of a known story with actions);
- Creation of whole class story map to support retelling;
- Creation of puppets to support retelling (art, design and technology)
- Interviewing of characters from the text/ News report (drama);
- Drawing of an innovated setting (art) with poetic descriptions;
- Discussion and plan of new, innovated story based on 'Dinosaurs and all that rubbish'
- Innovation of known story into a new genre (playscript);
- Use of visual learning journey to develop next steps and support peer and self assessment (Working Wall).

What were your success criteria?

- Children will show increased use of story language when telling and writing stories
- Children will show progress in speaking, listening and writing assessment outcomes
- Teachers will feel more confident in developing a cross artform approach when planning a cross curricular approach to Literacy

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

- Learning walks / study visits
- Logs or interviews
- Observation outcomes
- Periodic teacher assessment
- Pupils' work

Describe the CPD approaches you used

- Training - The two teachers who participated in the project attended the North Yorkshire central training course entitled Improving Writing in spring/summer 2009.
- Modelling - Modelling of strategies was integrated as a key feature of the two-day course. Video material from Pie Corbett's training sessions on the Talk for Writing DVD were also utilised.
- Learning conversation/ Coaching - I met with teachers regularly before, during and after the project to discuss the impact of learning and to develop next steps. (see Appendices 15-16 for more information.)
- Collaborative Enquiry/ Classroom Enquiry - Teachers worked with each other throughout the project to develop practice in application of Talk for Writing strategies.

Learning through the project was developed as part of the North Yorkshire Aspire arts programme (supporting the development of cross art-form projects). The learning outcomes identified for the course were to investigate how to support, challenge and enable all children to reach their potential as writers and to increase enthusiasm and inspiration to foster a positive writing culture in the classroom/school. As part of the course, delegates were

asked to complete a gap task where key strategies identified were implemented back in school and outcomes shared on Day 2. Participation in the project enabled the teachers to address this task. Teachers worked collaboratively to complete the task and I provided additional coaching support, as Consultant, to further enhance the application of strategies.

Who provided you with support?

- Local authority staff

How were you supported?

Throughout the project, I supported school staff in developing storytelling strategies in their own classrooms. In generating this support, I drew on knowledge obtained from the original Pie Corbett, Talk for Writing training (May, 2008) and the expertise of my Primary English Consultant colleagues.

Impact

What has been the overall impact on pupil learning?

Pupils' work reflects an improved knowledge of basic story plot structure and key story language. (See Appendices 3-10) Children were able to write with confidence at the imitate and innovate stage as they learned new stories and created their own adaptations to reflect understanding and synthesis of knowledge. In addition, work with the storytellers added to the learning experience as children were able to apply learned skills in new contexts. Evidence suggests that children built on previous learning by continuing to shape and develop learning using talk as a tool for writing

Work on the project also helped the school achieve success through the North Yorkshire Aspire programme. Pupils had the opportunity to develop their creative, critical thinking and artistic skills and to boost their self-esteem and confidence. The cross-curricular approach helped to make learning more meaningful for pupils and to provide the opportunity for application of skills.

Quotes you think are relevant to overall impact on learning

During pupil interviews, one Y3/4 child commented about storytelling, stating, "It helped me know the story so I could write it down." Another Y3/4 pupil shared, "The actions help you to remember the story. It helps to remember the words because the actions are normally the same." Pupils also enjoyed the opportunity to utilise the arts as a stimulus for writing. One pupil in Y3/4 commented:

"My favourite part was the bit where we were drawing the paradise. I liked drawing the flowers and the wildlife. It helped me with my writing because when I was drawing it, in my mind, it sort of went in and looked as if it was real. It was better because I could see what the sound was and what it looked like and all the colours." (see Appendix 2)

Quantitative evidence of impact on pupil learning

- Periodic teacher assessment

Qualitative evidence of impact on pupil learning

- Logs or interviews
- Observation outcomes
- Pupils' work

Describe the evidence of impact on pupil learning

Quantitatively, pupils made good progress in speaking and listening and writing outcomes throughout the project. In the four month time-scale from pre-assessment to post-assessment, 71% of pupils made one sub-level of progress in speaking and listening and 64% made at least one sub-level of progress in writing, with one pupil in the Y3/4 class making two sub-levels of progress. All other children showed observed improvement overall, but attainment levels remained the same from the beginning to the end of the project. There were no pupils who had a dip in attainment at the end of the project. (See Appendix 1)

Qualitatively, all pupils showed enjoyment and enthusiasm during the project as reported by teachers and observed by the researcher. All pupils in both classes were eager to share work on the Storytelling Sharing Day, when the researcher observed learning, conducted pupil interviews (see Appendix 2) and gathered video evidence. The use of the storytelling strategy was new for many pupils involved in the project, however, they all embraced the opportunity to become involved in storytelling experiences.

Both teachers have continued to use the storytelling strategy following the project. They have each explored further opportunities for storytelling to support narrative writing opportunities. The Year 3/4 teacher has also started exploring the use of storytelling to support non-narrative structures.

What has been the impact on teaching?

Teacher interviews were undertaken to ascertain perceptions of pupil progress during the project and to analyse the extent to which the arts were utilised to provide a springboard for writing. Teachers were asked the following key questions in order to qualify impact:

Quotes you think are relevant to the impact on teaching

The Y1/2 teacher provided the following reflective comments:

- "Children are leading their own learning and storytelling has helped to develop more independence and freedom of choice in writing."
- "All children wanted to get involved in what was on offer in the learning environment."
- "Children's choices helped to encourage others to have a go in trying new things."
- "There is a helping culture in the classroom and co-operation is much improved."

The Year 3/4 teacher provided the following comments:

- "I enjoyed the integration of drama techniques to help children to see ideas from the inside of the story."
- "Storytelling helps children to take more ideas to the act of writing as children already have the story in their minds."
- "I feel like I now have a 'can-do' attitude as planning for learning is much more flexible and relevant. I now have more tools in my teaching repertoire."

Evidence of impact on teaching

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

Describe the evidence of impact on teaching

Following the project, the Y1/2 teacher (also the English subject leader for the school) had the opportunity to share project outcomes more widely at the English Subject Leader Network meetings. She shared the project design and outcomes with local teachers throughout the cluster. As a result, many more teachers have become aware of Talk for Writing materials and are actively using the storytelling strategy in their own classrooms. The Y1/2 teacher has continued to use the storytelling strategy in KS1 and has extended learning into the Foundation Stage through link work with the FS practitioner. The impact of learning undertaken through the project has had a direct impact on the enhancement of teaching and learning in the classroom.

The Y3/4 teacher also had the opportunity to share project outcomes more widely throughout the cluster. (See Appendix 12 for the powerpoint presentation from this meeting.) The Y3/4 teacher and I led a training session for KS2 teachers in the cluster to discuss how the storytelling strategy could be adapted for older pupils. She reports that she is continuing to use and adapt the strategy to suit the purpose of learning and the needs of the pupils in her class. (See Appendices 13 and 14 for examples of Smartboard planning throughout the project.) She reports a greater confidence when planning for literacy and the positive benefits in the cross-curricular learning approach.

What has been the impact on school organisation and leadership?

Both teachers had the opportunity to share project findings with other colleagues throughout the school. The Year 1/2 teacher shared outcomes and provided coaching support for the other FS and KS1 colleagues, whilst the Year 3/4 teacher shared experiences of using storytelling with older children and provided coaching support for KS2 colleagues. The Headteacher provided time at staff meetings to share key outcomes more widely with staff.

As previously mentioned, the English subject leader (Year 1/2 teacher) also had the opportunity to share findings more widely with other subject leaders in the local area. As part of the termly English subject leader network meetings (led by the team of Primary English Consultants), delegates have the opportunity to share developments in their own schools as part of the 'good practice' sessions. As part of this session, the English subject leader shared the impact of the 'Storytelling through the arts' project on pupils' speaking, listening and writing. As a result, other teachers throughout the cluster had the opportunity to discuss how the storytelling strategy could be used to develop outcomes for children in their own schools.

In addition, the Year 3/4 teacher also had the opportunity to share findings more widely throughout the cluster by leading a training session on Storytelling in KS2. The teacher welcomed this CPD opportunity and the chance to work with others in the cluster. This provided a springboard for developing this teacher's further leadership potential within the school.

Evidence of impact on school organisation and leadership

Recently, the Headteacher and English subject leader organised a parents' evening on literacy (with my support). Through this session, parents were informed of the literacy curriculum throughout the school and approaches used to develop learning in each classroom. Storytelling and 'storymaking' was included as a key strategy in this session. Storytelling has become embedded as a key pedagogical teaching approach in literacy across the school.

Other staff throughout the school have also trialled and developed the use of storytelling in their own classrooms with success. In addition, more teachers in the cluster are now aware of the benefits of storytelling and are using this strategy to improve speaking, listening and writing outcomes for children.

Summary

What is the crucial thing that made the difference?

It was essential that teachers in the project were given the opportunity to share their successes with each other through collaborative learning experiences and with the wider school community as the project progressed. This had a positive impact on professional learning.

As the teachers involved in the project worked in different Key Stages, they approached the application of the storytelling strategy in different ways. Results of the project reflect the differing views of pupils of different ages and how the storytelling strategy impacted learning in each class. It was a new learning experience for each teacher as the strategy was explored and adapted for individual groups. Evidence provided through this project reflects the importance of using storytelling, not only as a strategy for FS and KS1, but also into KS2.

Another key factor was the attendance at the Improving Writing 2-day central training course. Through the course, teachers were provided with pedagogical support of a new strategy. Through the design and integration of the gap task teachers had the opportunity to revisit and review this strategy in light of their own class. The project gave teachers a specific focus for development and provided the opportunity to measure the impact on pupils' progress. As a Consultant team, we have continued the use of 2-day courses to provide the opportunity to revisit and review learning within a professional community of learners as part of the CPD process.

Evidence collected through the project suggests that pupil enjoyment and engagement improved as many had a new arsenal of skills for speaking, listening and writing by the end of the project. Pupils also reported greater confidence in their own abilities and a keen interest in using the arts as a vehicle for writing. Teachers felt that writing improved throughout the project with a greater emphasis placed on "talk" for writing.

Finally, the research has helped to develop the building blocks of integrating writing across the curriculum. Teachers and pupils showed progress, not only in their understanding and use of the storytelling strategy, but how knowledge this can be further enhanced through the arts using a cross-curricular approach to teaching and learning.

What CPD session and resources were particularly useful?

- Video material provided on the Talk for Writing DVD
- Materials and content provided on the 'Improving Writing' North Yorkshire central training course

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

For those interested in developing a 'Talk for Writing' themed project within their own school, I would recommend first reviewing the Talk for Writing DVD and materials. DVD 2 (provided in the pack), entitled Pie Corbett Talk for Writing CPD can provide a training programme for all Talk for Writing strategies including: book-talk, writer-talk, storytelling and story-making and word and language games.

Once staff have watched and discussed the introduction of the strategies, new learning could then be applied through application in classroom practice. It would be advisable to build in time for a further meeting, following the application of strategies in individual classrooms, to discuss progress and impact collaboratively as a staff. DVD 1 (also provided in the pack), entitled Talk for Writing provides schools with short clips of teachers using strategies in practice. This could provide a good stimulus for discussion amongst staff at this stage. Following this discussion, Lesson Study could also be utilised to support the further development of strategies and to measure the impact on learning ('Improving Practice and Progression Through Lesson Study' for more information <http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/node/126431>).

The key to the success of the 'Storytelling through the arts' project was the opportunity to revisit and review strategies and to have the opportunity to have professional learning conversations with other staff throughout the process. This is an essential ingredient which should be planned for.

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

As an outcome of the project, both teachers have expressed an interest in further developing storytelling in non-narrative forms. As an extension of the project, it would be interesting to see how others are using this strategy to develop storytelling in non-fiction to support with the development of text structure, language features and overall composition.

Supplementary Materials

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

- Storytelling/Storymaking
- Appendix 15: Project plan
- Appendix 16: Planning meeting notes
- Appendix 3: Storymap for Innovation of 3 Bears
- Appendix 4: Wanted poster for Goldilocks
- Appendix 5: Recount of role play walk
- Appendix 6: Innovation of 3 Bears story 1
- Appendix 7: Innovation of 3 Bears story 2
- Appendix 9: Photos of learning journey
- Appendix 10: Photos of setting innovation
- Appendix 11: Aboriginal story and picture
- Appendix 8: Innovation of story from another culture Y3/4
- Appendix 2: Pupil interview transcripts
- Appendix 1: Analysis of progress in speaking and listening
- Appendix 12: Listen, Imitate, Innovate, Invent presentation
- Appendix 13: Y3/4 Smartboard planning example 1
- Appendix 14: Y3/4 Smartboard planning example 2

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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. 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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