



CASE STUDY REPORT

Storytelling: Engaging and supporting early writers through Talk for Writing

Ruth Tromans

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 explore the use of storytelling as a technique for engaging and supporting early writers, and to draw conclusions about its effectiveness in motivating children to write and helping them make progress in narrative writing.

Aims: The main aim of this research project was to explore the use of storytelling as a technique for engaging and supporting early writers, and to draw conclusions about its effectiveness in motivating children to write and helping them make progress in narrative writing.

Methods: The participants of this case study were twelve Year 1 pupils, their teacher, teaching assistant, school leader, parents, and LA adviser. Methods used included a 2-day LA course, collaborative action research, storytelling technique, pupil interviews, teacher interview, observations, work samples, and progress data. Cross-curricular links, first-hand experiences, and talk to deepen learning were also used.

Findings: The main findings of this case study were that the storytelling technique was successful in motivating children to write and helping them to make progress in narrative writing, resulting in improved engagement with writing and progress in writing.

Implications: The findings of this case study suggest that the storytelling technique is successful in motivating children to write and helping them to make progress in narrative writing. This has implications for the use of storytelling in the classroom to engage and support early writers.

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?

With recent national and local focus on improving writing in schools, this research project was designed to contribute to the wider exploration of this area. Through a case study involving a group of twelve Year 1 pupils, this 4 week project explored the use of storytelling as a technique for engaging and supporting early writers. Its work is based on Pie Corbett's storytelling technique presented in the Talk for Writing materials (DCSF, 2008) and draws conclusions about specific aspects of this technique which are successful in both motivating children to write and helping them to make progress in narrative writing.

Who might find this case study useful?

- Carer
- Early years foundation stage practitioner
- LA adviser
- Leading teacher
- National Strategies consultant
- Parent
- School leader
- Subject leader
- Teacher
- Teaching assistant

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 project was intended to engage children in writing and by doing so, improve progress in writing.

What were your success criteria?

- Improved engagement with writing
- Improved progress in narrative writing, in line with national expectations for Y1

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

- Logs or interviews
- Observation outcomes
- Periodic teacher assessment
- Pupils' work

Describe the CPD approaches you used

- 2-day LA course 'Improving Writing', including modelling of the storytelling technique
- Collaborative action research involving the teacher and LA consultant

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

- Talk for Writing materials
- Action research as part of an MA in Educational Improvement, Development and Change

Who provided you with support?

- School leader
- Teacher
- Teaching assistant
- The wider community

How were you supported?

Teacher: partner in research
Head teacher - allowing time for the research to take place: consultant visits to the school
Parental involvement in first-hand experiences (part of the project)

Impact

What has been the overall impact on pupil learning?

Progress in writing: All children made good progress in their writing by the end of the project. In their independent writing at the end of the project and in their independent oral storytelling, all children were able to include storytelling language, some sequencing language, a logical plot sequence (although not all stories were finished) and appropriate characters and/or settings. All children wrote in full sentences and the amount of writing had increased significantly.

Engagement with writing: In pupil interviews and observations of pupils' writing, all pupils showed a more positive attitude to writing. Many children volunteered to write when given an opportunity to do so during a data collection session at the end of the action research project. Comments whilst observed writing included 'I'm going to tell the whole story', 'Can I keep it and finish it later?' and 'I'm good at writing' - a positive picture of writing attitudes on the whole.

Thoughts you think are relevant to overall impact on learning

It was clear that the pupils' renewed engagement with writing had enabled progress to be made in aspects of writing.

Analysis of the data at the end of the project revealed a clear link between the aspects of writing the children had improved in and the aspects developed by the storytelling technique. This suggests the success of this technique in developing narrative writing.

Quotes you think are relevant to overall impact on learning

'They didn't want to write at all. Now they want to write.' - Y1 teacher

'I'm good at writing now' - Y1 child

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

Evidence was gathered throughout the action research cycle, including:

- Pupil interviews
- Teacher interview
- Observations of storytelling and writing
- Work samples
- Progress data

What has been the impact on teaching?

Teaching has taken on a creative approach, with evidence of cross-curricular, thematic planning and enhancement of learning through first-hand experiences.

Evidence of impact on teaching

- Evidence from planning
- Teacher perceptions

Describe the evidence of impact on teaching

- Unit/ thematic planning
- Discussions with the teacher

What has been the impact on school organisation and leadership?

Not a focus of the research

Evidence of impact on school organisation and leadership

NA

Summary

What is the crucial thing that made the difference?

- Storytelling technique
- Actions linked to key language
- Story mapping
- Talk to deepen learning
- Cross-curricular links
- First-hand experiences to bring learning to life

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

- Talk for Writing materials

What CPD session and resources were particularly useful?

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

Start with getting to know the storytelling technique and having fun with it. Use a story which is easy to learn - those which repeat key phrases and have a simple plot are ideal. Find out what your class are interested in to boost engagement and then enhance learning further through discussion, thematic work and first-hand experiences.

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

Continue to share the storytelling technique with other schools as part of consultant role.

Supplementary Materials

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

- The research focus and method
- Planning
- Analysis of writing at the end of the project
- Observations of children writing at the end of the project
- Summary of research findings

About Camtree

Camtree: the Cambridge Teacher Research Exchange is a global platform for close-to-practice research in education. Based at Hughes Hall, University of Cambridge, Camtree draws on high-quality research from around the world to support educators to reflect on their practice and carry out inquiries to improve learning in their own classrooms and organisations. You can find out more about Camtree and its digital library at www.camtree.org.

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.

Licence

This edited version of this case study is published by Camtree as a derivative work of the original under a Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial Licence (CC-BY-NC 4.0). The structured abstract that accompanies it was generated by Camtree in 2023 using the OpenAI GPT-3.5-Turbo Large Language Model.