



CASE STUDY REPORT

The impact of talk and role play on writing

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This study was originally published in 2009 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 assess the impact of speaking and listening activities on writing in a Year 2 cohort, and to measure the progress made in terms of content, length, confidence, and attitude towards writing.

Aims: The main aim was to improve writing standards by encouraging children to take risks and be confident in their own ability, through regular opportunities to write in a range of contexts and areas.

Methods: The participants in this case study were teachers, middle leaders, senior management, and pupils in a Year 2 cohort. They worked together to improve writing standards and confidence. Methods used to improve writing included regular opportunities to write, CPD focused on raising and sustaining standards, teacher modelling, self and peer assessment, and celebrating achievements.

Findings: The main findings of this case study are that talk and guided writing sessions have had a profound impact on writing in terms of content, length, and confidence. Regular shared and guided writing sessions have been crucial for teacher modelling and for supporting and extending writing skills. Data comparison of cohorts revealed an upward trend in writing standards with 77% making 2 sub-levels progress or more.

Implications: The findings suggest that talk and interactive activities can have a profound impact on writing, increasing content, length, confidence, and vocabulary. It also highlights the importance of patience and modeling language and vocabulary to help children develop their writing skills.

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

Keywords: Primary education; English - speaking and listening; English - writing

Introduction

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

Writing had been identified as a whole school focus for improvement, particularly in Key Stage 1. It was felt that a large proportion of the children had limited experiences and this was hindering their writing. Vocabulary and language skills were also limited and children had difficulty verbalising their thoughts and hence could not translate their thinking into writing.

Children, on entry, had poor language acquisition. Foundation Stage Profile (FSP) revealed that, for this Year 2 cohort, 80% gained less than 6 points in Communication, Language and Literacy (CLL) & 70% gained less than 6 points in writing.

Who might find this case study useful?

- Teacher

Description

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

- English - speaking and listening
- English - writing

How did you intend to impact on pupil learning?

By encouraging all children to take risks as a writer and to be confident in their own ability. Children had regular opportunities to write in a range of contexts and areas, voluntary and directed.

What were your success criteria?

Standards in writing raised as children's confidence improved and quality spoken language improved in both spoken & grammatical structure.

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

- Data comparison of cohorts
- Observation outcomes
- Periodic teacher assessment
- Pupils' work

Describe the CPD approaches you used

As writing was a whole school priority there had been considerable training focused on raising and sustaining standards. CPD included planning and delivering from the revised framework, a re-fresh on guided writing and teaching writing in KS1. Work scrutiny and lesson observations indicated that progress was being made by all children in this Y2 cohort. Each child's weekly independent writing was kept in individual writing folders and clearly demonstrated how content and confidence had improved. This also illustrated how cross-curricular writing had been central to developing and extending pupil writing skills. Lesson demonstrations with this cohort and this practice were given in both whole class teaching and guided writing sessions.

Pupils were all assessed in writing and their progress tracked every half-term. The tracker revealed an upward trend across the year with 77% making 2 sub-levels progress or more from September 07 to July 08.

Who provided you with support?

- Middle leader
- Senior management
- Subject leader

How were you supported?

Feedback from lesson observations and work scrutinies, by Senior Leaders and Subject Leader, reinforced that progress was being made and highlighted the impact of this approach in raising standards. Lesson observations indicated how children's vocabulary had increased and how they were able to articulate their thinking at a higher level than before. This was then being transferred into their writing.

Impact

What has been the overall impact on pupil learning?

Writing considerably improved, in content and length, as did pupil attitude towards writing. Writing activities didn't bring worry to children but were greeted with enthusiasm and an opportunity to celebrate their achievements. Self and peer assessment was used to identify next steps for learning but also as a positive experience for the children as writers. This was in addition to the weekly 'Writers of the Week' whereby the teacher chose 2 to 3 pupils' work and typed it into a powerpoint presentation and then displayed it on the classroom's interactive whiteboard. Children then highlighted the positive elements of the writing, such as vocabulary, punctuation and features appropriate to the particular genre. After this the name of the author was finally revealed which boosted confidence and self-esteem after having their writing receive great praise from their peers.

Thoughts you think are relevant to overall impact on learning

Talk had a profound impact on writing, in content, length and confidence. Children were able to talk to their talk partner prior to writing which helped focus them on the activity before writing independently. Regular shared and guided writing sessions were also crucial for teacher modelling and for supporting and extending writing skills. Guided sessions were very much part of assessment for learning and were a response to issues arising in class. They were pivotal to planning for the next steps for learning.

Quotes you think are relevant to overall impact on learning

'When can we do our Barnaby Bear postcards as I have collected some amazing words to describe Scotland?' – Girl C, age 6

'The writing 'Boy T' brought home about the Cinderella's invitation to the ball was brilliant. We are so pleased with his progress.' – Parent of Boy T, age 6

'I talk to my talk partner and this helps me to think about what I am going to write about.' – Boy J, age 7

Can I finish my writing about our trip to the beach? – Boy C, age 6

Quantitative evidence of impact on pupil learning

- Data comparison of cohorts
- Periodic teacher assessment
- Test results

Qualitative evidence of impact on pupil learning

- Logs or interviews
- Observation outcomes
- Pupils' work

Describe the evidence of impact on pupil learning

This cohort had been underperforming in writing.

In September 07, 83% were working below level 2c on entry to Y2, 50% of pupils working at W.17% were working at 2c & these were the more able in the cohort. There were 4 pupils admitted during the year, all of whom were working at W.

By May 08 40% had attained 2b+ and by July 08, 45% 2b+ with one child being awarded level 3.18% attained 2c. 77% of the cohort made 2 or more sub-levels of progress.

What has been the impact on teaching?

Talk has continued to be a vehicle for the teaching of writing. It is embedded across the Y2 curriculum and is an enhancement to teaching and learning. The teaching of writing is interactive and addresses all learning styles. The oral rehearsal has supported pupils with special educational needs and those pupils lacking confidence whilst helping them prepare for the writing task. Guided writing is used to target areas for development in response to assessment for learning.

Quotes you think are relevant to the impact on teaching

'The confidence these children have now is incredible. They can't wait to get writing.' – Teaching Assistant

'I think Girl S's writing (displayed on IWB) is excellent. She has remembered bossy words and numbers for her instructions.' – Girl E, age 6

'I could hardly write and now look at my writing. You can see my writing getting better each week.' – Child after looking at her individual writing folder at the end of the academic year which contained her weekly writing tasks.

Evidence of impact on teaching

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

Describe the evidence of impact on teaching

Expectations of pupil performance in writing were raised and more children than in previous years attained writing at level 3 or with elements of level 3. 77% of the cohort made 2 or more sub-levels of progress. Lesson observations highlighted how high expectations were and also how the children themselves aimed high and rose to the challenge.

65% of the cohort were on the special needs register and the interactivity allowed all pupils to access the lesson and to make progress. This teaching approach addressed all learning styles. Talk & role play are increasingly planned for and teachers are more aware of the need for this.

What has been the impact on school organisation and leadership?

This approach is embedded in Y2 and has now been extended to the Y1 curriculum. Speaking and listening is planned for in a range of contexts and in a variety of forms- role play, drama, hot-seating, talking partners, small group discussion.

This approach to the teaching of writing will now be rolled out to KS2 this academic year following its success in KS1.

Evidence of impact on school organisation and leadership

Talk is now a key component in the how to develop and extend children's writing.

Summary

What is the crucial thing that made the difference?

Patience was crucial as children became familiar with a real increase in speaking and listening activities and how to fully participate in them. Key vocabulary was introduced and re-visited wherever possible. Teachers and children continually utilised new vocabulary and in all areas of the curriculum. The curriculum became enriched with talk throughout which then led naturally into the writing process. The talk prepared the children for the writing tasks and therefore they tackled the tasks with confidence and motivation. They took a great sense of pride in their work and achievement and relished self and peer assessment opportunities.

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

Refresh on guided writing to maximise on these opportunities to develop talk and writing.

What CPD session and resources were particularly useful?

Guided writing and how to effectively develop writing using these focused sessions.

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

- Audit of current speaking and listening in your classroom and where does it feature in the curriculum. What is its impact and can this be improved?
- Review classroom organisation and plan for paired work, small group, large group and whole class discussions.
- Model language, vocabulary and its structures, and encourage the children to do the same.
- Listen to your pupils and follow their lead.

Supplementary Materials

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

- Phase 3 plan
- Child A Work from start & end of project
- Child B Work from start & end of project
- Child C Work from start & end of project
- Termly Tracker Y2 2007-08

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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. 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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