

CASE STUDY REPORT

Raising standards in writing through storytelling

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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 writing standards in the school by introducing a new approach based on Pie Corbett's Storytelling into Writing project, which includes key resources such as Pie Corbett Storytelling into Writing (Key Stage 1 and 2), Jumpstart! Literacy and Jumpstart! Storytelling, The National Strategies Talk for Writing materials, and APP materials. The project requires a whole-school approach and understanding of the power of modelled writing.

Aims: The main aim of this development work was to adopt a new approach to help raise standards in writing, by engaging pupils in their learning, teaching them the skills they need to develop their writing, and challenging them appropriately with key resources such as Pie Corbett Storytelling into Writing, Jumpstart! Literacy and Jumpstart! Storytelling, The National Strategies Talk for Writing materials, and APP materials.

Methods: The participants in this project included the headteacher, senior leadership team, subject leader, teacher, and teaching assistants. They worked collaboratively to adopt a new approach to help raise standards in writing, using resources such as Pie Corbett Storytelling into Writing (Key Stage 1 and 2), Jumpstart! Literacy and Jumpstart! Storytelling, The National Strategies Talk for Writing materials, and APP materials. They also had a whole staff INSET on Storytelling and the LA Storytelling Project.

Methods used included visiting a "Storytelling School", holding staff meetings, providing CPD training, drawing story maps, using Talk for Writing, and providing differentiated checklists to adopt a new approach to help raise standards in writing. Key resources included Pie Corbett Storytelling into Writing (Key Stage 1 and 2), Jumpstart! Literacy and Jumpstart! Storytelling, The National Strategies Talk for Writing materials, and APP materials. CPD sessions focused on whole staff INSET on Storytelling and the LA Storytelling Project. The project requires a whole-school approach and understanding of the power of modelled writing. Further developments include extending Talk for Writing to all staff.

Findings: The main findings of this case study are that Storytelling into Writing has improved pupils' writing skills, increased their confidence and enthusiasm, and enabled teachers to use a wider variety of teaching techniques. It has also enabled the Literacy Leader to strengthen her leadership skills and adopt a new approach to help raise standards in writing, which requires a whole-school approach and access to key resources such as Pie Corbett Storytelling into Writing, Jumpstart! Literacy and Jumpstart! Storytelling, The National Strategies Talk for Writing materials, and APP materials. CPD sessions and resources were also found to be useful.

Implications: The findings of this case study suggest that Storytelling into Writing is an effective approach to improving writing standards, as it engages pupils, increases their confidence, and helps them to plan and structure their writing. It also helps to develop their vocabulary and sentence structure. To replicate this work, a whole-school approach and enthusiasm is essential, as well as access to key resources such as Pie Corbett Storytelling into Writing, Jumpstart! Literacy and Jumpstart! Storytelling, The National Strategies Talk for Writing materials, and APP materials. CPD sessions and resources are also useful for further development.

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?

Improving standards in writing, particularly for boys, has been a focus for our school since our Ofsted inspection in May 2008. Having identified sentence level work as an area for development, we spent the subsequent year working on sentence structure and punctuation, with fantastic results (What Works Well Case Study: Improving Standards in Writing through Developing Sentence Structure and Punctuation). We now wanted to build on this and further improve our progress in writing by adopting new strategies and initiatives. At this time, our Year 2 teacher was part of the Local Authority Storytelling into Writing project based on Pie Corbett's ideas. Storytelling seemed the logical direction to take next. We wanted to make all children, not just the boys, feel excited by their writing, increase in confidence and hopefully find writing easier and more rewarding.

Who might find this case study useful?

- Headteacher
- Senior leadership team (SLT)
- 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?

- By engaging pupils in their learning.
- By teaching children the skills they need to develop their writing.
- By providing children with more ideas to include in their writing.
- By giving children the skills to improve their range of sentence structures.
- By helping children better understand text structure, including paragraphing and cohesion between paragraphs.
- By improving the children's variety of language and vocabulary and their ability to use these in their writing.
- By improving their planning, and then their use of it when writing.
- By challenging children appropriately to ensure that they made good progress.

What were your success criteria?

- Children's writing uses a wider range of sentence constructions to make their writing more interesting.
- Children can plan and organise their writing more effectively into paragraphs and are more aware of the structure of their work.
- Children use a more varied and interesting vocabulary in their writing.
- There is an increase in the number of children at the expected age-related levels in each year group.

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

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

Describe the CPD approaches you used

Having decided to make Storytelling into Writing a whole-school project, I visited a fellow LA Lead Teacher at a local "Storytelling School" to see how Storytelling worked there, along with our Year 2 teacher who was taking part in a year-long LA Storytelling project. This visit was very important in helping us to see how we could implement Storytelling in our own school. We saw how classroom displays supported the process and looked at planning and resources. Discussions with teaching staff, together with looking at children's books, helped us to understand the approach they had taken.

We then held a staff meeting to introduce Storytelling. Having bought Pie Corbett's Storytelling into Writing for all staff, we basically just got stuck in! Our first steps, once we understood the principles, were to choose our initial stories within key phases and focus on all staff learning these, with actions. We all chose stories from the Pie Corbett Storytelling into Writing books although on subsequent occasions many teachers have chosen to write their own story, or to adapt an existing story. We drew story maps and prepared displays in readiness for the beginning of the unit. All staff were very enthusiastic about the project and worked collaboratively to ensure its success.

After "having a go" at a story for the first time, we held a staff meeting to review how it had gone, share good practice and iron out any glitches we had come across. There was very positive feedback from staff and this, and subsequent meetings, proved invaluable, especially for clarifying our work on Phase 2. We had felt unclear about exactly what we wanted to achieve from this phase and how best to achieve it. We felt that it was important to include all staff in Storytelling training, and so I ran a Storytelling workshop for both teachers and teaching assistants as part of our INSET in order to clarify issues that had been raised and to reinforce and build on what we were already doing. Ensuring that Teaching Assistants received the same training as the teaching staff enabled them to take part in, and fully support, the children's learning in all phases of the Storytelling process.

A development that we made was to have a focus for our Storytelling unit beyond the genre of the story itself. These included descriptive language and setting, character, suspense techniques, and speech. This ensured that we covered the objectives we needed.

During my Literacy Leader monitoring, I took modelled writing during Phase 2 as my focus for lesson observations. I was able to see how our ongoing priority of sentence structure was being embedded through Storytelling and particularly shared and modelled writing. Feedback discussions enabled us to continue to move this forward. Writing moderation sessions saw opportunities for professional dialogue about improving standards in writing and helped us identify next steps.

A Key Stage 1 teacher had requested further training on implementing Phase 2, and through my links with other schools, I was able to arrange a visit and lesson observation. In addition, Pie Corbett was leading training on Storytelling locally, which she was able to attend.

Who provided you with support?

- Leading teacher
- Local authority staff
- Senior management

How were you supported?

- The Headteacher was fully involved in the project, teaching a group of lower ability Year 6 children each day and using the Storytelling approach as the basis of her lessons.
- The Year 2 teacher attending the LA Storytelling project training was a great help, both with ideas and knowledge gained from her training and by her leadership of the project in Key Stage 1.
- The whole staff worked together to improve standards and adopt a new initiative.

Impact

What has been the overall impact on pupil learning?

- Children's confidence to write has increased.
- Children are motivated to write because they know how to do it.
- Children's, particularly boys', enthusiasm for writing across the school has increased.
- Children are better able to plan and to follow their planning.
- Because it is a different approach, we have been able to engage those children who have been harder to reach by "normal" teaching methods.
- Following the first year of this project, our School Improvement Partner described the developments made in writing as "Outstanding".

Thoughts you think are relevant to overall impact on learning

The children enjoyed the interactive nature of Phase 1 of Storytelling. They particularly enjoyed learning and telling the story – with actions – and drawing their story maps. Every class I have ever taught has loved drama, so this also appealed.

Embedding Talk for Writing through all phases of the writing sequence was essential for its success.

All abilities of children could access this work. Support for lower ability writers, along with differentiated checklists, meant that they were confident to take part and the improvements in the quality of their writing were really pleasing as they were able to write in a way that they otherwise could not. Some of the higher ability writers found Phase 2 restricting, although they understood the reasons for following the process and were pleased with their improvements in sentence constructions, and preferred the greater freedom of Phase 3.

Some sentence constructions became very memorable and added hugely to the spirit of collaborative learning in the classroom. Months after a particular story, children were still pointing out, laughing about and using a "whooping like a siren" phrase!

Quotes you think are relevant to overall impact on learning

- It is evidenced by the children's work that they are able to put into place all that they have learned during Storytelling, particularly their ability to vary sentence structure. (Acting Headteacher)
- Storytelling has increased the children's interest in books and their awareness that there is a wider world of reading. Some children seemed to have a preconceived idea about reading (especially if don't like it) and Storytelling has helped eradicate that. (School Librarian)

- A lot of children with Speech and Language difficulties are visual and / or kinaesthetic learners so Storytelling has had a big impact for them. Its repetitive nature is also very good for children with auditory memory problems. (Speech and Language specialist HLTA)
- Those children that have become disaffected with their learning have been able to re-engage with their writing due to the dramatic elements of Storytelling into Writing. Writing has become a more active experience rather than something that has happened passively to children. (Acting Headteacher)
- Storytelling is good because it lets you use your imagination. It's very helpful having paragraphs written by our teacher with all the different types of sentences because if you're stuck you can look at it and get some ideas. (Year 6 pupil)
- Storytelling makes me write long stories. I like learning a story first then I can use it and write something based on it. It's helpful having the actions to remember it. (Year 3 pupil)
- Storytelling into Writing has enabled a different learning style to be used which children may not otherwise have had the chance to experience, thus helping to ensure our teaching meet the needs of all learners. (Acting Headteacher)
- Storytelling into Writing enables the children to learn sentence construction, punctuation, text structure and so on as part of the whole process and not as discrete skills, making them real for the children and helping them to see how and why they are needed and used. (Year 2 Teacher)
- Storytelling into Writing has developed the children's Speaking and Listening skills as well as their story writing. By recording the children telling their stories, children in Year 1 were able to use the language of storytelling in a way that they would not yet have been able as writers. (Year 1 Teacher)
- You have got to listen to the recording of his story – he'd never have been able to write it down but the way that he tells it will make your day! (Year 1 Teaching Assistant)

Quantitative evidence of impact on pupil learning

- 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

In lesson observations, children are clearly motivated to write, know how to do it and can complete the task successfully. In addition, teachers have seen the impact of their improved writing across the curriculum as they have been better able to apply their skills in other subjects.

Interviews with children, as part of Literacy Leader monitoring, found that children across the school enjoyed Storytelling and felt that it had helped improve their writing (see quotes above).

Following NC Optional Tests and teacher assessments in May, an analysis of the results showed that the percentage of children in each corresponding year group who were writing at age-related expectations or above had risen from the previous year. From Year 2 to Year 6, an average of 91% of children made at least one sub level's progress in writing during the year, regardless of their ability, with the majority of children making two or more sub levels progress.

Children from our school wrote stories for a story writing competition run by a local newspaper for all local

schools. Our pupils won first prize in the Year 5 and 6 category and third prize in the Year 1 and 2 competition.

What has been the impact on teaching?

Teachers have gained an increased confidence when teaching fiction writing because they have a clear structure of what they need to do. The quality of teaching story writing has therefore improved. The delivery of lessons has become more interactive and incorporates more Drama and Speaking and Listening activities. The wider variety of teaching techniques, catering for more learning styles, also helps engage and enthuse the children. With our previous focus on improving sentence level work, teaching staff were already very confident at articulating the technicalities of sentence construction. They would all cite the development of their shared and modelled writing as important to the success of Storytelling (which in turn obviously impacts on other genres). Storytelling has also helped us to develop other examples of good practice, such as embedding our use of individual writing targets or of the use of Learning Walls in the classroom. Some key phases are now beginning to use the same approach for different genres of writing, with very pleasing results.

Quotes you think are relevant to the impact on teaching

Storytelling into Writing has helped grow capacity within the teaching staff for the teaching of Literacy, enabling teachers to explore new ways to engage children in their learning. (Acting Headteacher)

Storytelling into Writing has enabled me to take a new approach to teaching Literacy and incorporate elements of all the assessment strands within a unit. (Year 2 Teacher)

It's fun and interesting for the staff as well as the children who enjoy taking part. What's not to like? (Teaching Assistant)

Evidence of impact on teaching

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

Describe the evidence of impact on teaching

Teachers are very confident and enthusiastic when teaching fiction writing, and their delivery of shared and modelled writing has continued to develop, as evidenced by lesson observations. Classroom observations also show children progressing well and engaged. Close collaboration (within teams and with the Literacy Leader) has worked very well. APP and whole-school moderation of writing clearly shows the impact of Storytelling in both sentence level work and text structure.

What has been the impact on school organisation and leadership?

Leading the implementation of this initiative has enabled the Literacy Leader to strengthen her leadership skills and she has now been appointed to the school's Senior Leadership Team. The increased confidence gained from opportunities for leading INSET and training all staff have led to the planned introduction of Literacy workshops for parents.

The introduction of Storytelling has been so successful because of the support and collaborative working of all staff. As the Literacy Leader teaches Year 6, it was also very useful to have the Year 2 teacher, who was taking part in the LA Storytelling project, able to lead in another Key Stage. The strategies are used across the school and this whole school approach has seen TAs included in training with teachers.

Evidence of impact on school organisation and leadership

The Literacy Leader has been appointed to the Senior Leadership Team.

In house INSET has been led by the Literacy Leader and not externally and an increased range of opportunities for staff CPD has been provided by sharing expertise within the school. The Literacy Governors support these strategies and use their visits to monitor developments in writing.

Summary

What is the crucial thing that made the difference?

The whole school working collaboratively and enthusiastically to adopt a new approach to help raise standards in writing.

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

- Key colleagues who will lead the project.
- Pie Corbett Storytelling into Writing (Key Stage 1 and 2), Jumpstart! Literacy and Jumpstart!

Storytelling

- The National Strategies Talk for Writing materials
- APP materials

What CPD session and resources were particularly useful?

Whole staff INSET on Storytelling

LA Storytelling Project

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

This project needs a whole-school approach and enthusiasm. It is important to be confident in and to understand the power of modelled writing – children need to have seen someone do it in order to be able to write themselves.

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

We use Talk for Writing in Storytelling and some teachers also use it confidently in different genres. We now want to extend this to all staff.

Supplementary Materials

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

- Phase 1 planning
- Phase 2 planning
- Phase 3 planning
- Cathryn Wicks Storytelling - The Mermaid of Zennor.ppt
- Cathryn Wicks Storytelling Children's Work.ppt

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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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