



The development and implementation of high-quality teaching and learning strategies to support the progress and independence in writing of low attaining pupils, pupils with SEND and pupils with EAL at primary school level

A Leadership Legacy Project think piece from Amy Webb, Chapelford Village Primary School

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According to Ofsted, Chapelford Village Primary School is an above average sized, three-form primary school situated in the west of Warrington with a high proportion of children of a white-British heritage. It was built and opened in 2013 in a new development with as many as 5,000 new houses. Many children from the previous school relocated and a high number of children new to the area joined the school. For this reason, the school has a huge socio-economic demographic, including a number of pupil premium pupils.

As a school, we have noticed that on entry to primary school in EYFS, there has been an increase in the number of children with speech and language needs and difficulties. More and more children are starting school knowing fewer words and having a limited vocabulary. There has been a lot of research into the 'word gap' and the understanding that children whose parents read to them regularly know more words and are statistically expected to achieve more in reading and writing. Those children who are not exposed to a wide range of words, either through reading or conversation, begin school at a disadvantage knowing

fewer words and being less likely to recognise them in print, therefore struggling with reading and writing. The Educational Endowment Fund (EEF) has researched this and published guidance for schools stating that "phonological skills at age five, for example, predict reading ability at age seven and vocabulary at age five predicts child's ability to complete the more complex tasks of reading at age 11." Furthermore, I have seen for myself the impact the Covid lockdowns has had on the communication skills of pupils, especially our younger learners. This has had a detrimental effect on reading, writing and spoken language skills. As part of the class teacher job role description at my school, it is required for each teacher to have a subject lead responsibility. As a primary subject lead, you are responsible for driving the success of the subject through careful planning and sequencing of a broad, ambitious and balanced curriculum in which pupils make expected progress towards end outcomes. It is important to stay up to date with curriculum research, understand key developments in your subject and to consider the ever-changing needs of the children at your school.

I began my career as the subject leader of modern foreign languages. After driving this subject for four years, and implementing a well-planned and sequenced curriculum, I was ready to embrace new challenges and I requested to be part of a bigger, core curriculum subject. I was then assigned to the English team, with a particular focus on years 1-3 since I had taught in lower phase for most of my career.

The English team are responsible for many smaller subjects that come under the general umbrella term of literacy. This includes writing, reading, spelling, handwriting and spoken language. Many systems had already been implemented as part of our whole school approach to the planning and teaching of literacy. As a school, we use specialist external consultants from The Literacy Company to support the English team in reviewing and redesigning our English curriculum. Their scheme for writing is called 'Pathways to Write', it adopts the mastery skills approach where different skills are taught progressively through different units across the academic year. Each half term, there is a unit which has been planned lesson-by-lesson building up to a final writing outcome for pupils to apply the half term's skills.

Using this approach enables pupils to apply prior knowledge and skills through a range of fiction and non-fiction genres and for teachers to have a secure understanding of each year group's end points. Since I joined the English team, I have been reviewing the implementation of the Pathways to Write scheme across the school. Staff voice has been positive, and the general consensus is that it been really supportive to staff in terms of planning and assessment. The Pathways to Write approach has had a positive impact on writing data across the school. However, one question that I kept coming back to was: "how is this being adapted appropriately and effectively for our lowest attaining pupils, pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and our pupils with English as an Additional Language (EAL)?"

What were my first steps?

My first action was to establish what the current provision was for these children in writing. What did planning look like? Were teachers secure in their understanding of the skills that they needed to teach? What scaffolds and support were available for pupils? Was there an expectation for them to learn independently? Were they always supported by an adult? I decided to focus on years 2, 3 and 4 to evaluate what was working well in the provision and development of vocabulary for these learners and to identify the next steps. It was clear to see that in a school where consistency is key, there were many different approaches to teaching those children who were not meeting age-related expectations (ARE). Figure 1 shows what actions were taken and how this identified my next steps.

What was implemented?

As English lead, one of my key priorities was to review the planning and teaching for low attaining children, children with SEND and pupils with EAL to enable all pupils not only to make better progress, but also to feel confident in their writing. When reflecting on how to support staff and develop the provision for these pupils, I decided to focus on the use of visual aids and vocabulary through literacy learning.

Figure 1: Actions taken and next steps.

Action	Evaluation	Next steps
Book scrutiny	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It was not clear when the children had been independent and when they had been supported by an adult. Some visual aids were used to inspire and engage children. Academic guidance focussed on key skills such as punctuation relevant to the age and stage. Expectations in terms of quality and quantity were inconsistent. 	<p>Introduce A book and B book.</p> <p>Support with adaptive planning including the build-up of vocabulary.</p>
Pupil conferencing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some children could not read their writing back as they had been so heavily supported in writing it by being given/copying spellings etc. Some children did not have much confidence in their writing. Some children did not feel motivated or engaged in writing. Some children did not know what they could use to support them in their writing if they felt unsure. 	<p>Introduce A book and B book.</p> <p>Ensure appropriate scaffolds are planned into each unit of writing.</p> <p>Much more high-profile use of visual aids when writing.</p>
Staff conferencing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff felt confident adapting the P2W scheme for children working on the relevant year group, but less so in adapting to meet the needs of lower attainers. Little experience in teaching children with EAL with staff requesting CPD. Staff were somewhat confident in planning isolated lessons which supported these learners but did not consider the 3 weekly unit and progression. 	<p>Support with adaptive planning.</p> <p>Discussions about individual children and their needs.</p> <p>Support from the SENDCo.</p>

The EEF refers to the use of knowledge strips, visual aids and sentence starters as an effective, evidence-based strategy to support high quality teaching for all pupils, especially those with SEND. Oxford Owl, a specialist online literacy company, state that the more words children know, the easier they will find it to join in with discussions, express themselves, and ultimately write well (for the purpose of this, I will define 'well' as age-related expectations). The EEF also go on to state that this should be supported with "repetition, repetition, repetition".

In other words, the more children are exposed to the vocabulary, the more they are reading it and saying it aloud, the more confident they will be using it, in both oral and written contexts. I reflected on the literacy curriculum strategy we have adopted at Chapelford and thought about how we could best adapt this to incorporate these strategies. After discussions with the deputy headteacher and the SENDCo, I decided to trial the following strategies in years 2, 3 and 4:

- A book 'A' and a book 'B' to be introduced to identified pupils; book A was for vocabulary and skills-based tasks, book B was for the 'longer' writes as in the application of the vocabulary and skills (this is also a dyslexia-friendly strategy).
- At the beginning of each unit, children completed vocabulary-based tasks. Teachers selected key vocabulary linked to the text which would enable children to compose sentences linked to the learning. Throughout the unit there would be opportunity for 'repetition, repetition, repetition'.
- Support teachers with planning to ensure it is well thought out and sequenced to give pupils the opportunity to overlearn and apply the taught vocabulary in a variety of different contexts, similar to those pupils working at ARE.

Overview of strategies implemented

- Key vocabulary at the central point of every unit

Teachers were told to pick out (approximately) the ten most 'useful' words linked to the text that was being shared to the class. This was to be key words, nouns mainly, that were essential to understanding the text and being able to write about it. For example, year 4 studied a class text based on the rainforest and orangutans. The key words identified to support these learners were: orangutan, rainforest, human, ape, fruit, leaves, branches, trees, Asia. Children were introduced to these words with pictures and asked to match them, then the subsequent activities were all based on these words.

- Book 'A' and Book 'B'

According to the National Literacy Trust, high quality writing depends on good transcription skills and working memory. For some children, this can be a barrier to learning, and to writing. I found that children engaged well with the vocabulary tasks and realised we needed to further develop this to make it more purposeful. Many teachers had identified that a main barrier to learning was the children's

inability to copy information. I decided to trial having a 'Book A' and a 'Book B'. Book A is for the vocabulary and skill practise based tasks and Book B is for the application of the vocabulary and skills. In order to be successful, children should have their Book A open in front of them to use the vocabulary and scaffolds in a much more purposeful way when they are writing. This minimises any copying errors and saves pupils learning time.

- Visual scaffolds

The EEF defines scaffolding as "a metaphor for temporary support that is removed when it is no longer required", providing "enough support so that pupils can successfully complete tasks that they could not yet do independently". The children in which we are targeting are children who struggle to organise their ideas or compose a simple sentence that is coherent. By having visual aids, such as pictures from the text they are studying, and the vocabulary from their Book A, they have the support they need to compose a sentence for the purpose for which they are writing. For example, when the year 4 children have studied the above ten words (see paragraph 1) and have completed incidental tasks related to this vocabulary, they will have the tools and confidence they need to complete an independent write e.g. a section of a non-chronological report about what orangutans eat (using the pictures and words linked to this).

What does this look like in practice?

I have been working closely with teachers in the targeted year groups to evaluate the impact of these teaching strategies. I have also implemented this in my own practice with my pupils in year 3. The teachers I have collaborated with on this project have been really pleased with the results and have reported a significant, positive impact on their children's enthusiasm, motivation, independence and progress in writing.

Conclusion

I am clear from my evidence and evaluations that the strategies I have implemented have had a positive effect on the teaching, learning and provision of writing for our target pupils, including those with SEND and EAL. The TES have stated that not only does a poor vocabulary link to behaviour issues, but it has a direct link to attainment in reading and writing. As part of English INSET in September, I will be rolling out these strategies across the school for teachers to adopt in every class. I fully believe these strategies will support the progress and independence of our weakest performing children. It will give them the tools they need to make progress in their written and spoken language meaning that targeted teaching can focus on year group-specific grammar skills, thus accelerating progress for all pupils.