

The schools and teachers

- Michael Faraday Primary School, Southwark: Paul Armstrong, Year 5 and Gill Dove, Year 4
- Brunswick Park Primary School, Southwark: Leonie Jones, Year 5 and Judith Herbert, Year 4
- Sir James Barrie Primary School, Wandsworth: Susie Midgley, Year 5
- Wormholt Park Primary School, Hammersmith & Fulham: Katie Brown, Year 5

Suggestions for further reading

Barrs, M. & Pidgeon, S. (2002) *Boys and Writing*, London: CLPE

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Dawes, L., Mercer, N., Wegerif, R. (2000) *Thinking Together; a programme for developing thinking skills at KS2*, Birmingham: Questions Publishing

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DfES (2004) *Speaking, Listening, Learning: working with children at Key Stages One and Two*. London: DfES

Goodwin, P. (ed)(2001) *The Articulate Classroom; talking and learning in the primary school*. London: David Fulton

Ofsted (2003) *Expecting the Unexpected: Developing creativity in primary and secondary schools*. London: Ofsted

QCA (2003) *Creativity; find it, promote it*. London: QCA

Children's bibliography

Causley, C. (1996) *Going to the Fair*, selected poems for children, London: Puffin Books

Crossley-Holland, K. (2001) *The Sea Woman in The Magic Lands*. London: Orion

Sachar, L. (2001) *There's A Boy In The Girls' Bathroom*. London: Bloomsbury

Further information

The research will be published by the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education

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National Teacher Research Panel

engaging teacher expertise

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Effective teaching to raise boys' literacy learning and achievement

Funded by the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation, the Mercers' Company and the Reuters Foundation

Aims of the project

The research aimed to find out whether and how oral, interactive approaches to literacy might engage underachieving Year Four and Year Five boys in school literacy learning within the context of whole class teaching. Research questions included:

- how does oral rehearsal for writing (reading aloud, a range of discussion opportunities, and forms of drama) encourage underachieving boys to respond to texts and prepare for writing?
- how does creating a visible audience (through performance) or a virtual audience (using ICT) for reading and writing affect boys' perceptions of literacy and their achievement? and
- how does collaboration and peer support help boys' literacy development?

Context

This two-term literacy intervention project targeted boys in Years 4 and 5 in four inner London schools. Many of these boys are "can but don't" readers and writers. They are able to read and write but are not practising or extending these skills. The interventions were drama, using ICT and a range of speaking and listening structures. Six teachers, supported by the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education, developed these approaches to literacy using three specific texts so that outcomes could be compared across six classrooms. Children's work may be seen on the project website: <http://www.clpe-project.ik.org>

Summary of main findings

Quantitative and qualitative data provide evidence that:

- targeted boys began to write more and with greater enthusiasm after two terms;
- written work by the targeted boys showed a greater sense of reader and audience;
- spelling and punctuation improved;
- opportunities to email characters in the texts studied particularly appealed to boys and led to texts of greater length and complexity;
- the project website proved a useful focus and source of ideas for the cross London project schools; parents could also see children's work and leave messages in the online guestbook.

Background

The schools are in areas of social and economic deprivation, with high numbers of free school meals, ethnic minority and EAL children and children with SEN. One school has the highest number of asylum seekers in its LEA. In three schools there is a large gender gap in literacy attainment especially in writing.

Four boys were targeted in each class to create a case study pool of 24 boys. 21 of 24 boys have computers at home and use them for between one and four hours every day for games, writing, 'painting', word-processing homework and a wide range of web reading. They were less involved in what school literacy had to offer. Boys' reading attainment was higher than their attainment for writing, although most of them said they enjoyed writing stories. Teachers in the project ranged from NQT to subject leaders and a deputy head with 30 years of teaching experience. It was fruitful for a group of teachers to work with common texts and approaches. This generated more data, and teachers enjoyed coming together to compare experiences and outcomes.

Teaching processes and strategies

The interventions

- Developing class 'rules for talk' and posting them on the project website.
- Using these 'rules', engaging in extended 'Book Talk', using 'Tell Me' questions.
- Using role play and drama to develop language and ideas for writing.
- Using ICT for interaction in play and real-world contexts.
- Writing and editing collaboratively.
- Performing and publishing children's texts.

The texts

A poem: *What Has Happened to Lulu?* by Charles Causley. With this text, email emerged as significant writing for boys who enthusiastically and imaginatively wrote to 'Lulu': *Dear Lulu, why did you leave in the first place? And why did you leave your rag doll? If you just wanted to go away you could just say to your mum I want to be alone...*

A traditional tale: *The Seal Wife*. This short story provoked intense discussion about why the mother leaves her family to return to the sea. Children wrote their own versions of the story: *The wind was howling as I shouted "MOTHER! MOTHER! But the wind took my breath away. She was just about to dive into the sea when a thunder-bolt hit the shore. Then she saw me and gave me a blowing-kiss as she dived into the sea. I felt flabbergasted. I felt terrible and I never saw her again...*

A novel: *There's A Boy in the Girls' Bathroom* by Louis Sachar. This contemporary novel was a smash hit. Classes developed dramatic vignettes from the novel, wrote in role and kept mini-journals that incorporated drawing and writing, and emailed characters. One boy said: *"This is about a real boy who is having problems. He is trying to be good."* Another boy said about developing drama from the novel: *"It makes me actually want to come to school."*

Creative uses of ICT

ICT played a role in the project in three important ways. Firstly, some of the case study boys who normally wrote very little indeed became involved in emailing characters in the texts. For example, in the work based on the poem by Charles Causley some boys wrote in role, as members of Lulu's family, to lulu@clpe.co.uk. Email offered opportunities to write for real purposes in a form that appealed strongly to these boys, resulting in texts of greater length and complexity than their usual writing. In its informality (a hybrid between talk and writing) and provisionality, email was a kind of play writing, which reluctant writers enjoyed.

The research team also created interactive software based on two of the texts. Its purpose was to offer further opportunities to discuss dilemmas and issues posed by the texts and children were invited to navigate their way through a series of open-ended questions. The software also offered links to web-based texts - for example the software based on the poem had links to a BBC website which had stories and comments from children who had run away in real life. The team had anticipated that children would work independently with the software in pairs and groups, but in fact it was most often used by teachers to guide group discussion of a text.

The project website (<http://www.clpe-project.ik.org>) provided an important focus as the project progressed, providing a sense of identity and community for children and teachers working in the project in schools which were spread across London. The publication of children's work was a source of pride as it enabled children to share their success with their families and schools. Teachers involved in the project could see what classes in other schools were doing and could also see the results of their successful teaching interventions.

Findings

Opportunities to develop ideas and language for writing through talk, collaboration, text enactment, role play and using ICT engaged boys in school literacy. Targeted boys began to write more and with enthusiasm after two terms. As they wrote more, their writing became more sustained and controlled. Transcription also improved. We found that targeted boys are making progress in literacy, but not at the rate called for by the statutory assessment framework. Teachers were in agreement that summative QCA (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority) tests did not reflect what boys had achieved over two terms. Holistic assessment of boys' behaviour as writers in conjunction with a collection of their writing showed where and how they were improving (see table).

| Characteristics of improving writers | Characteristics of improving writing |
|---|---|
| Increasing confidence | Language shows evidence of texts that have been read |
| Less reluctant | Language moves away from writing close to speech and uses written language forms and structures |
| More willing to take risks | |
| Increasing stamina | Texts more coherent and make sense |
| Writes more at length | Texts more fully imagined |
| Concentrating longer periods | Evidence of attention to characterisation |
| | Evidence of control of dialogue in narration |
| Increasing independence | Texts become longer, ideas more sustained |
| Needs less support | Texts show increasing syntactic complexity |
| More self-starting | Texts more cohesive between paragraphs |
| Increasing involvement | Texts show growing sense of reader and audience, language appropriate to genre and purpose |
| More engaged | Texts marked for meaning with appropriate punctuation |
| More self-motivated | |
| More satisfaction from writing | Texts show range of spelling strategies and standard forms |
| Increasing experience | |
| Familiar with and able to tackle a wider range of texts | |

Research methods

Quantitative and qualitative data were collected over two terms and collated by the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education. These included: interviews with teachers and boys, regular classroom observations, videotape of classroom interactions, QCA test scores, NC attainment levels, CLPE reading and writing scales, reading records and writing samples before, during and after the interventions. Teachers were supported by CLPE through INSET and in-class support as interventions were carried out and evaluated.

CLPE Reading and Writing Scales, which are holistic assessments of reading and a collection of writing over time may be found on the CLPE website: www.clpe.co.uk

Conclusion

In the Summer Term of 2003, as this project was ending, the Department for Education and Skills (2003, 2004), QCA (2003), and Ofsted (2003) sent unequivocal messages that teachers can and should 'take ownership' of the literacy curriculum. These recent national initiatives for creativity, flexible timetables, cross-curricular literacy and a renewed emphasis on speaking, listening and drama all support the approaches of this small project.

We found that successful teaching and learning is active and interactive. When teachers created units of work around whole texts that made time for discussion, enactment, writing at length and integration of ICT for communication, underachievers and indeed all children had a rich learning experience.