

East Ayrshire Council

Department of Educational and Social Services

Catrine Primary School/Auchinleck Academy

Building Bridges in Literacy

A Case Study

School Contexts

The partner schools involved in our project are Auchinleck Academy and Catrine Primary School, both members of the Auchinleck Learning Partnership which brings together a wide range of services to support young people.

Catrine Primary School is a co-educational, non-denominational school which opened in 1967 and is situated in an area of deprivation. The school roll at present is 137 in 7 single stream classes. Auchinleck Academy is a modern 6 year comprehensive which opened in 1971. Auchinleck Academy serves a wide and diverse community of towns and villages.

Overall Aims

Our overall aims were to enhance professional partnerships to ensure continuity of methodologies and experiences from P6 to S2 with reference to:

Analysis of texts

Writing across the curriculum.

Desired Outcomes

For pupils:

- **To improve attainment in reading, understanding and analysis of texts**
- **To provide pupils with a clearer understanding of the relationships between reading and writing**
- **To enhance pupils' confidence in reading and their ability to create a range of texts across the curriculum**
- **To increase pupils' sense of purpose, ownership, independence and involvement in their reading and writing.**

For staff :

- **To enhance professional partnerships through the development of professional dialogue**
- **To create a stability of transition from P6 to S2**
- **To develop a common approach in teaching strategies by working together to share understanding and develop practices**
- **To increase staff confidence and expertise in P6 to S2 with regard to effective strategies for engagement with pupils and to help pupils' engage with text.**

For the learning community :

- **To create an interest and understanding in the development of children's reading and strategies for support at home within the community**
- **To improve communication regarding learning and teaching in reading and writing within Catrine P.S. and Auchinleck Academy, including liaison with librarian to further enhance interest and attainment in reading and writing**
- **To disseminate our approach throughout our partner schools.**

Context

Staff involved in the project are:

Mrs. Campbell McClinton	H.T. (Project Leader)	Catrine P.S.
Mrs. Elsie Meek	P.T./P.7 Teacher	Catrine P.S.
Mrs. Mhairi Abram	P.6 Teacher	Catrine P.S.
Miss Mary Byrne	P.T. Literacy	Auchinleck Academy
Mrs. Vicki Grove	Chemistry Teacher	Auchinleck Academy
Mr. Stan Gibson	D.H.T.	Auchinleck Academy
Ms Janice McGill	Librarian	Auchinleck Academy
Mrs. Carole McConville	Q.I.O.	East Ayrshire Council

The key focus of the project is as stated under aims and desired outcomes. At the start of the project, we separately conducted an audit to establish the needs and preferred priorities of each school. Questionnaires were also issued to children taking part in the project. These audits dictated how the action plan was set up. They also established next steps in staff development and research needed to fulfil the action plan. Staff development took place as follows:

- Consultancy meeting with Anne Neil (Strathclyde University). This included advice on strategies, reading materials, “building the bridge” from reading to writing and approaches to teaching and learning.
- In-service provided by EAC Early Intervention Team, namely D.A.R.T.s
- Noel Patterson (Paisley University) - critical friend and provided advice on action research
- Research : The Black Box Paper (formative assessment)
 David Wray and Maureen Lewis writing strategies
 Improving Our School Series
 Writing across the Curriculum document

The Development

As a result of the research we implemented a variety of strategies, evaluating their effectiveness in :

- looking at formative assessment**
- looking at reading**
- looking at writing.**

The four teaching staff from both schools shadowed each other over a period of time. Secondary staff observed and assisted Primary staff in the classroom becoming involved in language and other areas of the curriculum. Primary staff also visited the secondary school and worked in English language classes and chemistry classes in the same way. After further consultation, we established a framework for further implementation. See appendix 1 which provides the model for lesson planning and children’s work set up at that time and is the model currently in use.

Parents of the children involved were notified through our monthly newsletter. Catrine Primary School Board were also informed of the initiative and kept fully informed of our progress.

Primary Perspective

The audit which was undertaken at the beginning of the project highlighted the children's weakest area as being reading for comprehension. Therefore we needed to evaluate our teaching strategies in this area. The children were fluent in mechanical reading, but comprehension skills needed to be developed. Others who were hesitant in reading were using their concentration on word attack rather than understanding of the text. We reflected upon what we considered to be good and effective practice and using consultant advice and research as previously detailed, planned strategies which we hoped would motivate the children, be relevant to task and improve comprehension skills, not only in English language, but in the other curricular areas.

Our areas of concern were as follows :

- **Concentration**
- **Unfamiliar words**
- **Ability to identify issues in a passage**
- **Memory recall**

The effect of these difficulties led to the children having a lack of motivation and a poor attitude towards work; they had already resigned themselves to underachieving.

From our research we decided on strategies which we devised as a programme of good practice and also provided a structured approach which could be easily disseminated to other staff. The basis of this approach was :

- **Skimming**
- **Scanning**
- **Note-taking**
- **Listening for comprehension**

Listening

Listening was recognised as a very important skill and a good basis on which to build. (See appendix 1, page 1, for procedure). Good results are dependent on an ability to concentrate and on memory recall. Note-taking became an invaluable prop as the children recalled significant points. Understanding came more easily to the children as they identified words and phrases to answer questions. It was recognised that listening for what was already known was unnecessary. There was now a need for children to focus on information they still required to find out.

Fiction

The children worked in trios or pairs leading to working individually as required for National Assessment (see page 2, appendix 1). The group discussion boards (page 4, appendix 1) were used to very good effect by the children. Unfamiliar words were discussed and strategies used to aid comprehension.

Non-Fiction

Again, the children worked in trios or pairs. The texts were related to other curricular areas and pupils used the word investigation sheets effectively (see page 5, appendix 1). In larger scale topic work, children are given direction for researching information (see pages 6 and 7, appendix 1). The direction given by the teacher enables children to locate resources and information and focus only on that which is relevant.

Conclusion

There are encouraging signs within Catrine Primary School that these strategies are improving reading comprehension.

- **attitude and motivation has improved and this is being sustained to date**
- **increased concentration level**
- **80% of children taking National Assessment in Reading at Level D in May 2004, scored 25, 26 or 27 out of 27 possible marks**

Secondary Perspective

Background

Auchinleck Academy was entering the second stage of a whole school writing initiative. So far the whole school had undertaken staff development training in the writing process as outlined in HMI Improving Writing 5-14. The aim was to incorporate more writing into all courses. We had focussed on the use of writing frames and planning to support pupil writing. We saw Building Bridges as an ideal opportunity to extend this and develop curricular links with one of our associated primary schools. We were also keen to look at improving reading and further developing strategies to help pupils cope with the reading demands put on them in all subjects.

Initially a focus group was agreed to enable monitoring of progress. An S2 mixed ability group was chosen (levels A-E in both Reading and Writing) and strategies were agreed. These were:

- **Teaching skills required for Reading Across the Curriculum (skimming, scanning and reading carefully; keywords; using context clues to find the meaning)**
- **Using models to teach key features of types of non-fiction texts**
- **Sharing user-friendly criteria**
- **Peer and self assessment**
- **Feedback through marking**

Methodologies were trialled in the classroom; regular meetings were held to discuss progress and review/evaluate what had been achieved.

Pupils and parents were informed via the school Newsline and letters were sent home to the parents of pupils in the focus group. Opportunities were also given at the S2 Parents' Evening to discuss the project. The rest of the school were informed via updates at departmental meetings and Principal Teachers' meetings.

English Department Perspective : Miss M. Byrne

Areas of Concern

Particular development needs of the focus group were identified. The timescale was such that it would be difficult to measure progress by National Assessment therefore another measure was required. By examining class work, knowledge of pupils and general observation the following were recognised as areas of concern:

- **very little reading**
- **few risks with unfamiliar vocabulary**
- **ineffective planning in writing**
- **careless technical errors in finished pieces - even after conferencing**
- **written feedback not acted on - even when marked as "Next Step"**
- **little responsibility for own learning**

Strategies

This last issue was addressed by firstly adopting some formative assessment strategies. The aim was to get pupils thinking for themselves. Questioning techniques were evaluated; a policy of "no hands" was used when questions were asked; "wait time" was employed along with various strategies to ensure full involvement such as the use of individual white boards, time limits, thinking pairs/trios.

Reading

Firstly, skimming and scanning was targeted. Short non-fiction passages with headings/subheadings/captions/pictures were used with games to encourage them to find main ideas and supporting detail. These skills were applied to the texts being used in class (examples included in pack).

Information obtained from the reading tasks was used in a piece of writing. Pupils were given a meaningful context with a clear audience. This is not unusual in the English department, neither was looking at a number of models in groups to identify the features of the genre. However letting them form their own framework for planning from the models was a new development. As a class the pupils drew up targets/criteria together for their piece of writing. The benefits of this were a shared understanding of why these targets were important and more effective planning.

Writing

WILF (What I'm Looking For) was introduced to support the sharing of criteria with the pupils. Pupils are now accustomed to discussing targets for a piece of writing before beginning and they are pinned to a target board with WILF at the top as an easy way to remind them and keep them on task. WILF is also used in peer/self assessment. He helps keep the conferencing agenda focussed and manageable (examples in pack).

From the research "Inside the Black Box" the team was aware that to be effective "feedback should cause thinking to take place." The 2 stars and a wish approach which was already

Writing (cont'd)

operating in the English department at Auchinleck Academy was adopted by all. Several strategies to ensure pupils acted on this feedback were put in place. Pupils would set their own targets by reading the teacher's comments and rewriting it in their own words. They prioritised their top 3 development needs and chose one to focus on. These were written into their pupil

organisers along with the strategies required to achieve it. Targets were reviewed regularly and they moved on to next priority after discussion with the teacher. The English department is continuing to develop effective ways of using feedback through marking this session.

Conclusion

The impact of the new strategies can be seen in a number of ways:

- **obvious progress in motivation - pupils more actively involved in their own learning as a result of target setting, drawing up their own frameworks for writing and the use of "wait time"**
- **National Assessment evidence of improved attainment in Reading - of particular note is a small group of boys who had achieved level D in primary 7 but had made little progress since, they achieved level E in May 2004.**
- **pupils more focussed when doing Reading tasks and have strategies to help them find information - they now ask the teacher for the keyword in the question rather than for the answer**
- **evidence of more effective planning in writing and in some cases more independent planning.**
- **now using models effectively, looking for ideas to help them with the structure and language of their own writing pieces**
- **attainment in writing among focus group has improved with pupils meeting their individual targets and agreeing new ones**
- **National Assessment evidence to support improved attainment in individuals.**

Science Department Perspective : Mrs. V. Grove

Background

The priority as a science teacher is to teach the science course to S1/2 and time is limited. Strategies which could be implemented effectively were discussed with the project team in order to raise attainment in science (which it did).

Strategies

The science textbook has always been used by simply reading the passage and then answering the questions. However, the text is often quite difficult for pupils to understand. **DARTS** were applied to various pages of the textbook to help pupils access the text, for example, sequencing activities and flow diagrams etc. Skimming and scanning techniques and reading carefully were adopted here using the same methodology as the rest of the team.

Strategies (cont'd)

Several writing tasks were devised using the non-fiction text chart to help pupils process the scientific information learned, for example, reports, leaflets, posters and discursive writing.

- **user friendly criteria**
- **modelling**
- **showing pupils how the model becomes the frame for their own writing**

Examples of the work pupils produced are:

- **reports on Global Warming - these were written using a writing frame**
- discursive piece on Hydro electricity looking at the advantages and disadvantages – these were written following a whole class brainstorming **exercise and planned using a spider diagram**

More reading was integrated from a variety of sources, an "Energy Poster Project" with S2 was devised where pupils had to research a particular form of energy, for example solar/wave power, devise a poster, and present their poster to the class. This involved skimming/scanning/reading carefully and pupils were taken to the Library where they could use books, Internet and CD-Roms to look for their information. They were warned not to simply copy out lots of information, but to use their KWL grids to find what they needed. They were instructed to complete a spider-diagram by taking notes. Before pupils were allowed to start the poster, the WILF/targets were revised. The students made a real effort to convert the text into user-friendly language (audience awareness). Finally pupils presented the poster to the class. Results were impressive and good understanding of the topic was demonstrated.

Another project the second years undertook was their acid and alkali leaflets. For the model, information from the Energy Posters was used to construct a leaflet, which showed the pupils a different way of presenting information. Students used this model to provide a framework for their leaflet. Pre and post-testing confirmed a significant improvement in attainment.

Conclusion

Techniques employed have definitely improved pupils' attainment. Also, they enjoyed working on the posters/leaflets. It gave those that are less scientifically minded a chance to achieve and shine in an environment where they would often feel inadequate.

The time constraints in the S1/2 science curriculum mean that the writing tasks cannot be incorporated into every topic however the reading methodologies are an effective way to improve understanding and increase pupil motivation.

Implications

Further development work is taking place as follows:

Primary

- Self assessment for children is being developed within the Primary school
- Staff at Primary 4 and Primary 5 level are being provided with training by Mrs. Meek and Mrs. Abram in the strategies we have developed through "Building Bridges" for implementation within these classes.

Secondary

- Good practice from "Building Bridges" is being disseminated across all curricular areas and research work will continue.

Primary and Secondary

- A joint home link reading group is being set up involving Primary 6 and 7 children from Catrine P.S. and S1 and S2 from Auchinleck Academy
- Catrine P.S. tracking records are being transferred to Auchinleck Academy with the P.7 children to further track and compare progress of the children involved in the project.

Conclusion

This is not a "quick fix". The research and implementation of these strategies from P6 to S2 is a result of hard work in planning and teaching by the staff involved. The success of the project resulting in improvement in reading comprehension skills leading to the development of writing across the curriculum will depend on these approaches being sustained, not only in the schools involved in the project, but across the Learning Partnership.

Our Learning Partnership action plan for session 2004/05 involves the dissemination of these strategies to the partner schools. We have already presented our project to the Primary 7 staff and some Head Teachers and provided appendix 1 to all the partner schools. We have offered to provide CPD to all schools within the partnership and the primary staff have been invited to two schools to provide this and team teach with the staff at Primaries 6 and 7.

Catrine Primary School is building bridges "down the way". Staff at Primaries 4 and 5 are being provided with CPD in the use of the approaches and strategies developed by our team. This will help develop comprehension skills, provide for continuity and progression from the middle to the upper stages then to S2 and improve attainment in reading leading to improvement in writing skills across the curriculum.

Further development work between Catrine P.S. and Auchinleck Academy will be taking place. We have successfully placed a joint bid with the Scottish Executive for the Home Link Reading Initiative. This will commence in October and involve children from P6 to S2. Catrine Primary School has developed a simple tracking system which records individual children's attainment at **Conclusion** (cont'd)

5 - 14 levels in Maths, Reading and Writing, levels attained and how long between each level. These records will be transferred to the relevant staff at Auchinleck Academy.

In Auchinleck Academy the project work is being extended to other departments. Individual staff are taking on the methodologies developed by the project team and implementing them within the context of their classroom activities. These teachers will be meeting regularly to monitor and evaluate progress made with the intention of disseminating to the whole school next session.

The secondary staff involved are familiar with Catrine P.S. children and their abilities. The language and teaching strategies being used by the members of the project team when teaching the children will have a continuity and be familiar to the pupils when they transfer to secondary school. The project team have developed strong professional relationships during the past year. This project will continue and develop with the support of management of both schools and hopefully eventually all schools within the Learning Partnership.

Resources

Among resources used were:

- Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone
- First Science
- Focus on Meaning
- Fifty Shared Reading Texts
- Key Comprehension