

Draft Case Study

Introduction

Our story starts with Wester Hailes Education Centre being involved in a Raising Attainment Pilot. They required to work jointly with one of their feeder primary schools and already had successful links with Clovenstone Primary. The schools already regularly liaised in P7 transition meetings, Successmaker, French, Science, Art, PE, Music and Maths and so the two establishments were happy to work together to build even more bridges!

School Setting and Context

Primary School: Clovenstone Primary School, built in 1975 in the area of south-west Edinburgh, is a non-denominational school with Catholic religious instruction and serves Wester Hailes, an area of multiple deprivation. The majority of families are on low income or are claiming unemployment benefit and the housing stock is largely council property with some housing association and a few owner occupied establishments. The area suffers from significant social and economic deprivation but is undergoing considerable environmental regeneration.

A recent Authority review found that the very good school ethos and caring environment supported pupils in achieving high standards in their personal and social development work. The current school roll is 287, which includes 56 nursery children; there are 11 classes. The Head Teacher has no teaching commitment and is supported by a Principal Teacher. There are four visiting teachers - for physical education, drama, music and craft .

Secondary School: Wester Hailes Education Centre is a purpose-built community school that opened in 1978. It is a six-year non-denominational comprehensive school serving Wester Hailes. Its associate primary schools are Clovenstone, Dumbryden, Hailesland, Sighthill and Westburn.

The school roll for session 2003-2004 is 504, with a staffing complement of 63.8 full time equivalent teachers. A proportion of this staffing level is financed from the community budget since the function of teaching staff includes the provision of adult education. The Senior Management Team comprises the Principal supported by three Depute Principals.

The secondary school prides itself on the quality of the relationships achieved among staff and between staff and pupils/parents/carers, and seeks to improve upon the quality of these relationships to facilitate the effective delivery of the curriculum.

Our Vision

Our Primary audit revealed underachievement in writing throughout the school and teachers who lacked confidence in the teaching of writing. There was also an absence of a whole school policy of writing. Our secondary school audit showed underachievement in both reading and writing throughout the school, a reluctance by pupils to read and the absence of a whole school policy with regard to literacy.

As a working party, we aimed to raise attainment in reading and writing by:

- motivating children to read
- developing strategies to promote engagement, interaction and a sense of personal responsibility
- establishing a good reading habit
- enhancing children's writing experiences
- enhancing professional partnerships in P7 – S2 to ensure continuity of methodologies and experiences.

After much collaboration, we agreed the following mission statement:

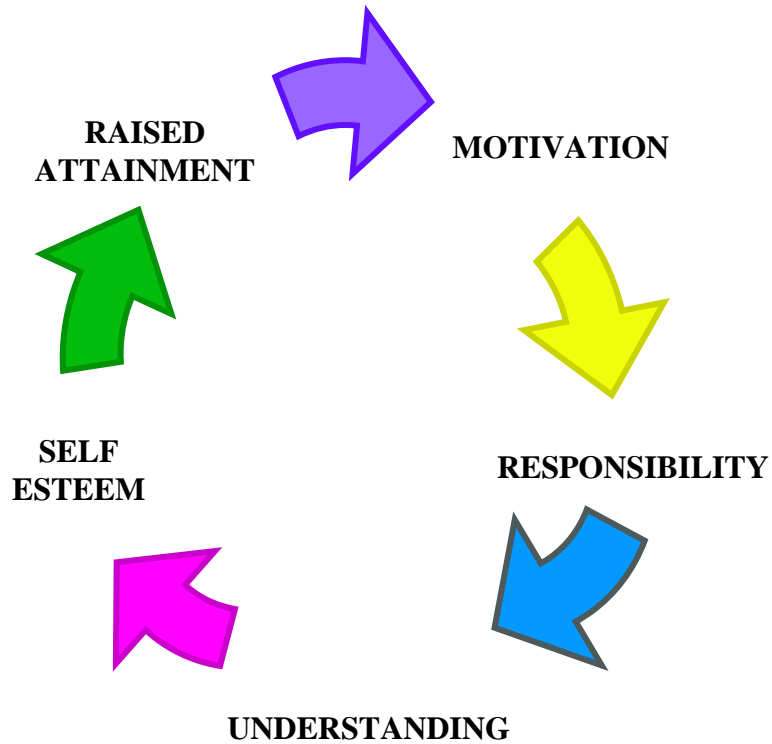
Primary Aim: "To develop a writing programme that will enrich the writing experience and develop expertise with continuity and progression from P6 to S2."

Secondary Aim: "To develop and implement a reading programme that will encourage reading and enable teachers to guide and monitor students' progress."

We targeted these aims in three sectors - pupils, staff and the learning community. Our desired outcomes for pupils were:

- Increased motivation to read
- Students to take responsibility for own reading and learning
- Students to have a consistent range of writing strategies
- Students to have improved confidence in reading and writing across the curriculum
- Improved access to learning.

It is hoped that by adopting this model, we can achieve:



For staff:

- Enhanced professional partnerships as a result of:
 - the development of professional dialogue; and
 - working together to share understanding and develop practices
- Having strategies in place for helping students to develop their reading skills
- Having increased staff confidence and expertise from P7 – S2 by using a mediated, interactive, structured approach to writing.

And for the learning community:

- Enhanced learning as a result of:
 - improved communication regarding learning and teaching in literacy (primary/secondary and across subjects, including liaison with librarian)
 - continuity of experiences for students in terms of methodologies and expectations in literacy
 - increased parental involvement and responsibility for their children's learning

Methodologies and Resources

Using a Resource as a Springboard

Clovenstone searched for an appropriate writing resource and decided upon the North Lanarkshire Writing Programme. The headteacher, committed funding and staff time to whole school training and development in order to implement the use of these materials. Five members of staff attended a two day course in Motherwell. After being impressed by this resource, they returned to school full of enthusiasm. They then disseminated the information gained to the rest of the school during an in-service. Resources were then purchased and a new whole school approach was adopted for writing.

In order to facilitate the desired progression and continuity, professional dialogue took place in the form of cooperative teaching within the P7 and S1 classes. Follow-up evaluation and reflection ensued. Initial nervousness disappeared as colleagues got to know each other better and the new teaching environment became more familiar. This process gave the secondary colleagues first-hand experience of teacher-modelling, classroom display, writing targets and conferencing, which are an integral part of the North Lanarkshire Writing Pack. Similarly, primary colleagues gained insight into the skills required to enable children to progress at secondary.

Further opportunities were sought to link the two aims. To this end, we designed an inter-campus website, "WRITETHRU2WHEC". This will enable primary pupils to access texts recommended by first year pupils. These texts will highlight good examples of "Colourful Characters", "Sensational Settings", "Brilliant Beginnings", "Phenomenal Phrases" and "Excellent Endings". The first years will be encouraged to find these examples from the texts in the Reading for Success Programme.

Additionally, P7 children were invited to storytelling sessions hosted by the secondary school.

Adapting the North Lanarkshire Pack in Secondary

As a consequence of the HMle Report following their visit to the secondary school in June 2002 and the finding that attainment in writing was 'fair', it had been a priority in the departmental development plan to address the 'dip' in expected attainment in writing between P7 and S2. Initially, it was intended to update the existing provision for writing. This was a ten-week unit, 'Storywriter', delivered at the beginning of S2.

Following discussions with Clovenstone, already in the process of implementing the methodologies suggested by the North Lanarkshire approach, it was agreed that with modification, the course could be suitable for secondary school. It was also felt that there would be considerable benefits for the students and staff if the same methodologies when teaching writing were used. For students there would be the obvious advantage that the teaching of writing to which they would be exposed to in secondary would simply be an extension of the methods and terminology used in primary. For staff there would be the expectation that at least among students from Clovenstone (although it is hoped that with the success of the pilot, other associated primary schools will come on board in time), there would be no need to 'reinvent the wheel'. Furthermore, staff would benefit from increased confidence by using a mediated, interactive and structured approach to writing.

However, given that the writing pack was designed predominantly for the primary sector, in order for it to be successful in secondary there had to be changes in both the resources required and in how it was to be delivered.

The first issue, therefore, was ensuring that the staff involved in the project were comfortable with the new approach to the extent that they could provide in-service training for the rest of the department. Unfortunately, the timing of the North Lanarkshire training course, which acts as an introduction to the writing course, did not meet our timeline. The primary teachers felt that this training was essential for a full understanding of the programme and unfortunately, therefore, development of the unit for secondary had to take place before the secondary specialist had been on the course. Difficulties with this have been overcome through discussions with primary colleagues and several visits to the primary to see the methodologies being used. Clearly, however, considerable time could have been saved if the secondary specialists had attended the first of the North Lanarkshire in-service courses.

Following on from the initial familiarisation with the ideas in the pack, negotiations had to take place within the department to ensure that enough time would be made available in the S1 timetable to deliver the new writing programme. Central to the North Lanarkshire approach is the recognition that writing must be taught regularly and over the entire school year. It was recognised that constant reinforcement and the revisiting of skills, as advocated by the North Lanarkshire scheme, were necessary to ensure that students reached their potential in writing. A more flexible approach to Successmaker and the way it is used in the department freed up the time to make this possible.

In addition to experimenting with timetabling, it was also decided that the optimum results from this programme could be attained only if the S1 classes were set when the programme begins. Initially we had hoped to create four levels with our S1 intake; however, this proved to be impossible as the S1 arrived in two blocks. The solution was to broad-band each of the two blocks into two levels and to create resources for one group at levels A - C and another C – E/F. This of course has implications for differentiation within these groups. It was felt, however, that the formative assessment elements inherent in the course and the careful planning of resources, together with effective training of staff, would alleviate most difficulties.

The most serious problem regarding the whole project arose when it was recognised that time would need to be devoted to modifying the pack to meet our requirements. Despite there being funds available to provide cover for staff engaged on the programme, there were two main problems. Firstly, the lack of suitable cover - i.e. a subject specialist willing to be engaged for relatively short periods of time. Secondly - and often compounded by the first problem - the need for the class teacher to ensure that the class retained its continuity and progression in their absence. Taken together, these two factors resulted in a considerable increase in the workload of those involved in the project.

The new writing programme is now in the final stages of development and will be implemented departmentally following the October 2004 break.

Reading for Success

“Reading for Success” was developed by Wester Hailes Education Centre in order to improve the falling levels of literacy within the school. A significant number of students were coming into S1 with a reading age significantly below their chronological age and this was making it difficult for them to access the curriculum across all subjects.

At the core of “Reading for Success” is a commercial package: Accelerated Reader. This was developed in the US and is now starting to gain ground in the UK. In this programme, students choose a book from a wide range of literature. The books are assigned levels of difficulty and the student should ideally select a book from their zone of proximal development. Each book is worth points. The child reads the book (the programme also allows for being read to or paired reading) and when finished, logs on to a computer and calls up a quiz for that book. The quiz is taken on line. The software marks the quiz and gives immediate feedback to the student. If the quiz is passed, the points are awarded and the software records this in the student’s profile. More

detailed analysis of performance is available to the teacher in the many reports that can be called up. Targets can be set and rewards given.

“Reading for Success” in Wester Hailes Education Centre is, however, more than Accelerated Reader. In its pilot year we established a club that operated three times a week. Students participated in various activities and competitions (or indeed just sat and read); storytellers and authors also visited the club.

One of the main problems we had in the first year was getting the children to carry their book with them at all times. This has largely been overcome in the second year as the book is now considered part of the school uniform and teachers across all subjects expect students to have a book available if required. It is now the norm for S1 students to start the day at group tutor time by reading. Students take their books home and parents are encouraged to support their reading. The programme is becoming entrenched in school life, helped by the fact that we recently received a substantial grant to purchase more books, more software, a new library operating system and rewards for students who meet their targets.

The programme is in its infancy but we are optimistic that it will continue to flourish and we will see levels of literacy rise. Although Reading for Success was initially part of the Building Bridges initiative, in conjunction with the North Lanarkshire Writing Programme, it was felt that it was too ambitious to accommodate these two divergent aims. However, as “Reading for Success” gathers momentum, we are hopeful that our associated primary schools will, in the future, engage in the programme prior to students coming into S1.

Library Links

The Library’s input to the project was to collaborate with the English department in managing the selection, acquisition, cataloguing, processing and promotion of the Teenage Fiction identified. The Library was the venue for hosting the author and storyteller visits. Its relaxed, friendly atmosphere allowed students to engage with authors informally whilst surrounded by books! It was also the location for the Reading for Success club held thrice weekly. Above all Building Bridges allowed the Library to be part of the ‘book buzz’ - in a big way.

Invaluable too, was the opportunity to exchange information about children’s authors and titles with Primary School colleagues - the chance to swap recommendations! We had time to explore ideas such as the possibility of High School students identifying titles and “Gr8 Reads” for P7 pupils!

The chance to visit the Primary School Library and to meet with the P7 classes proved an exciting opportunity for the Librarian. It gave her the opportunity to publicise the Library and highlight books and poetry. So keen were the pupils that the P7 teachers decided to bring their classes to visit the secondary school Library on a weekly basis throughout the summer term. This allowed the pupils to familiarise themselves with the Library and get to know the librarian in advance of their official transition days to the High School in June. It allowed her to promote the Library's "coffee table" books, capitalise on current TV and cinema themes to promote titles and read extracts from a selection of exciting teen authors' books. In addition the children can "take a quiz" and get a flavour of the Reading for Success project. We hope that this motivation will help to encourage the children to read for pleasure.

Evaluation

Issues

It is difficult to address the question of what the authority's next steps will be regarding this programme, as we have had practically no support or guidance from them. It should be pointed out that this has been due to a number of factors, not least staff changes and the resultant break in continuity.

The project has been severely hampered by staff changes. The Quality Improvement Officer, English who undertook the role of project leader, moved to another authority early in March 2004 and her successor remained in post for only a short period. A new appointment is still awaited. The principal teacher of English, had to withdraw from the day-to-day running of the project following a promotion later that year. Hopefully, when the Authority appoints a new Quality Improvement Officer, that person will take on the role of project leader and will support the evaluation of the programme and will undertake any necessary follow up work.

Another main difficulty for both sectors was the time out of class required for input into this project. Finding quality supply cover that could ensure work left by the class teachers was completed thoroughly and accurately, proved to be a major hurdle. The writing programme demanded a large amount of time each week...if teachers were out of class "Building Bridges", they were not in class furthering the writing programme! Problems were compounded because children from this deprived area thrive on continuity and resent their teachers being out of class so often. This resulted in unnecessary classroom disruption. So money for supply cover was not the answer.

It was hoped, initially, to involve another curricular area in this project and so a representative from the CDT Department attended the initial conferences. To date he has had no involvement other than being aware that children in his Department have their library book in their bag at all times and should the opportunity arise, they should be encouraged to read them in their spare time.

Next Steps

As a result of the Wester Hailes cluster receiving a substantial grant from Read Together, it has been possible for each of the associated Primary Schools to obtain a licence to start running Accelerated Reader. Exactly how the programme will be implemented is still being decided, but it

is hoped that children will be familiar with the programme and have an increased enthusiasm for books before they reach High School. Clovenstone hopes that their future planned library visits will incorporate an Accelerated Reader "Quiz Time". It is hoped that this practice will spread to other primary schools.

Despite the various difficulties encountered, we are very proud and pleased that the links we have formed at classroom level will benefit staff and children from both establishments in the future. We intend, therefore, to develop these links further.

Clovenstone Primary School

Headteacher – Maria Plant

Principal Teacher – Eileen Henaghan

P7 Class Teacher – Carolyn Didcock

Wester Hailes Education Centre

Headteacher – Alex Wood

Depute Head – Jane Frith

English Teacher – Danny Shirreffs

Librarian – Anne Brownlee