

“BUILDING BRIDGES IN LITERACY” : DRAFT CASE STUDY

“READING FOR INFORMATION, WRITING TO INFORM”

Kilwinning Academy, Abbey Primary School

North Ayrshire Council

Context

Abbey Primary School is situated close to the town centre of Kilwinning. The original part of the building was built in 1934, and two extensions were completed in August 1998. A non-denominational, co-educational primary school, it is one of five primary schools in the Kilwinning cluster.

Kilwinning Academy is a non-denominational school also situated close to the town centre of Kilwinning. The school is keen to foster links with all areas of the local community. Most recently the school has developed close links with the North Ayrshire Campus of James Watt College.

All staff are highly committed and many give willingly of their time to provide additional support for pupils at lunchtime and after school.

Aims of project

- To raise attainment and achievement in reading to impact positively on writing.
- To increase teachers' understanding of learning styles and how they impact on subject-related literacy.
- To develop an active model to enhance subject-specific literacy.
- To enhance professional partnerships P6 to S2, to ensure continuity of methodologies and experiences.

Timescale

The “Building Bridges in Literacy” National Pilot Project commenced in June 2003. An audit was undertaken in September 2003; key priorities were identified, an action plan drawn up, action, roles and responsibilities identified, use of funding and timescales agreed. Pupil questionnaires were devised and administered; pupils' responses were analysed. Regular meetings were held with the project team and local authority advisers. A draft Case Study was prepared in October 2004.

Strategic Context

The project evolved primarily as a result of an initiative underway in Kilwinning Academy “Literacy Across the Curriculum”, and of discussions on literacy with primary colleagues.

In primary, there was an awareness of pupil underachievement in reading and writing.

In secondary, literacy skills across the curriculum required further development.

The audit for the action plan identified that primary and secondary pupils were experiencing difficulties in reading, particularly with the techniques of skimming and scanning. The focus therefore was on the development of strategies to enhance subject-specific literacy:

- to highlight specific links between reading and writing
- to develop interactive strategies for staff-pupil communication and for engagement with texts.

In secondary, those initially involved were the Assistant Head Teacher responsible for literacy, the English Department and the school librarian. History, Modern Studies, Science and Support for Learning staff became involved. Primary 6 and 7 staff and the Literacy Co-ordinator were committed to the project, which was strongly supported by Head Teachers and Senior Management of both schools.

Research

The Report of the International Reading Association PISA Task Force (Programme for International Student Assessment) concluded that student engagement in reading had a greater influence on achievement than did socio-economic status or parental occupation. Motivation to read and the amount of time spent reading are important contributors to the gap between good and poor readers.

“Differently Literate”: Dr Elaine Millard; keynote speaker at Gender Conference.
D Wray and M Lewis: various texts. D Wray keynote speaker at Literacy Conference.

SCRE Publication: Perceptions of Reading in the Secondary School. J Allan, A Brunton.

Improving Achievement: HMle

Taking a Closer Look at Reading: SCRE

Learning to Write, Writing to Learn: S Ellis, G Friel

United Kingdom Literacy Association publications

Links to school, local authority or national initiatives

Literacy Conferences in North Ayrshire, commencing with “Literacy Across The Curriculum in the Secondary Schools” in 2002, followed by conferences on Reading and Writing for P1-3, P4-5, P6-S2.

H.E. Jenny Allan, University of Strathclyde.

Monitoring and evaluating

Procedures included:

- Progress of Focus Group.
- Pupil interviews (termly).
- Lesson observations: interactive learning strategies, modelling.
- Discussion with staff at regular intervals.
- Sampling of pupil work.
- HT briefings.
- H.E. link visits, discussion of action plan etc.
- Evaluation of CPD events.
- Regular minuted Primary/Secondary/Authority Project Meetings.
- 5-14 attainment data.

The teaching and learning experience

Resources and activities

Cross-sectoral visits by both Primary and Secondary staff, including librarian, were undertaken. Primary staff visited Secondary to observe literacy in a range of subjects in the junior curriculum.

Members of staff from Biology, English, Geography and Mathematics departments had previously led workshops in school during in-service on Writing Frames. Skimming and Scanning, and Scaffolding for Learning. As part of the Building Bridges project Skimming and Scanning techniques were highlighted by History and Modern Studies departments, and strategies developed to enhance pupils' skills in these aspects. More extended writing was encouraged by the use of writing frames.

A short unit on "Getting information from the Internet" was linked to an S1 Science topic. Pupils were taken step by step through the task, to develop web site familiarisation. Web site evaluation and note-taking were included. This specifically addressed the high interest in using computers for learning activities, especially by boys. Research has shown that this interest is correlated with higher reading performance.

In English, functional writing was a major focus in S1. Strategies to develop the techniques of skimming and scanning were highlighted. The end product was a Report on Kilwinning Academy for Primary Seven pupils written by S1 pupils. Examples of writing frames to cover the six main types of non-fiction writing, including one specifically designed to interest and motivate boys, had been discussed during the whole-school in-service mentioned earlier.

A series of lessons based on reading for information/writing to inform was delivered to a Primary 6 class. Each of the lessons was observed by the DHT, and on some occasions by staff from the secondary English department. Each lesson was revised and consolidated the following week using slightly different texts.

Pupils were encouraged to use books, the internet, and also the public library. Ultimately a large class book was produced. In the production of their book, pupils were able to practise and utilise all the skills which had been taught in the previous lessons and follow-ups.

A large selection of Big Books, both fiction and non-fiction, was purchased in order to support and further develop the type of lessons which had been delivered.

Outcomes and impact of work done

From comments, exemplars and evaluations it is evident that pupils now have an increased sense of purpose, ownership and involvement in their subject-specific reading, with a positive impact on their writing in these areas. They now have a range of reading strategies to draw on suited to their needs as learners. There is a clearer understanding of the relationship between reading and writing. Pupils confidently read and create a range of texts across the curriculum.

Photographic evidence conveys the range of skills developed, and the enthusiasm with which pupils undertook tasks.

The work done has increased staff confidence and expertise P6 to S1, with regard to effective strategies for engagement with pupils, and helping pupils to engage with texts.

Professional partnership has been enhanced as a result of the development of professional dialogue, and of working together to increase understanding of common issues and develop effective practices to address them. Common approaches to transactional writing have been established.

General comments

Time will be required to allow opportunities to refine and extend what has been done.

Questionnaires will be re-issued to primary and secondary pupils. Results will be collated and compared with previous findings.

A final Case Study and materials will be prepared for Internet publication. A CD rom will be produced to incorporate findings, evidence, photographs and exemplars of work done.

The good practice identified by the project teams will be shared within their cluster group, and across the authority.

