

Improving children's narrative writing through film clubs

Legsby Primary School, Lincolnshire

Problem: What challenges does your school have that need to be addressed?

Teachers in the participating schools report that pupils of all abilities struggle to progress in line with expectations in written composition. By the time they reach the end of Year 5, children are expected to produce evidence of their ability to:

- describe settings, characters and atmosphere
- show awareness of audience and purpose
- select appropriate grammar and understand how such choices can enhance meaning,
- link ideas across paragraphs using adverbials of time and place (National Curriculum 2014).

In Legsby Primary School, an after-school programme has been enabling a small number of children to participate in innovative film pedagogy that teachers report has a beneficial transfer of skills into their writing (pupils from Legsby Primary School will not participate in the evaluation). However, this claim has not been investigated, or tested in a systematic way. The participating schools wish to establish whether there is a link between the film-literacy pedagogy and improved attainment in writing by the end of Year 5, and therefore whether there is a case to evaluate film-literacy pedagogy in the mainstream curriculum.

Innovation: How will the innovation help improve the problem you have identified and benefit teachers and learners?

The intervention is a structured programme of film-enriched literacy, based on the international film education programme *le Cinema cent ans de jeunesse* (CAAJ). Every year this programme sets out a recursive curriculum of watching, making and discussing film, which participating teachers contend has powerful, but formally untested, impacts on children's literacy.

Our innovation will be to explicitly tailor the programme to cross over with the school literacy curriculum, specifically the requirements around written composition; awareness of audience and

purpose; textual cohesion; understanding of character, setting and action. Over the period of the intervention, a randomly selected cohort of pupils will follow an after-school programme based on CCAJ. They will:

- produce three film exercises (typically 1–2 minutes long), which are made to the same brief
- watch and discuss a set of film clips which contextualise and support the film-making
- follow a set of writing and speaking activities that bridge the film activities with the skills of written composition (for example, listening to film sound and generating adjectives; building sequences of shots; comparing transitions in film with those in writing).

The intervention will culminate in a ‘synoptic’ activity, planning and making a 5–7 minute film, to a common brief. This activity will test pupils’ capacity to sustain longer form narratives and audience attention, and their ability to employ a wide variety of stylistic techniques.

Existing evidence: What evidence is there that this innovation will improve outcomes?

Indicative evidence that film-centred pedagogies support children’s writing:

- Parker (1998) found evidence of children changing their writing having followed film lessons, particularly in managing character and reader point of view; however, the work didn’t look at whole cohorts, nor have a control group.
- UKLA/ BFI Reframing Literacy (2008) found that there was substantial cross-over in literacy between film and print fictional forms, concepts and understanding; however, the study was observational, not systematically evidence-based.
- Moving Image Education project in Angus, Scotland (2004-2008) found impacts from moving image teaching on children’s literacy more widely, but focused on animation, not live action narrative.
- Parry (2013) found that ‘Film production enables children to pay attention to the distinct modes of film and to combine them to create meaning. By doing so they are making explicit aspects of their understanding of narrative which would otherwise remain under the surface.’

The Bradford Media Literacy project (<http://www.primaryfilmliteracy.com/>; ongoing) is finding correlations between film-centred pedagogy and improvements in both reading and writing, but has no focus on narrative and text level per se, nor does it use control groups.

Research question or hypothesis: What effect will the intervention, implemented for how long, with which pupils, have on what outcomes?

What is the impact of attending an after school club delivering a film-based pedagogy for seven months on the narrative composition of year 5 pupils?

The expectation is that at the end of the programme, the participating children will be producing written work of a greater variety, more sophisticated use of narrative forms, greater textual cohesiveness, and will demonstrate a deeper understanding of audience and purpose than that of their peers in the control group. It is hypothesised that adapting a film pedagogy to explicitly enable a transfer of narrative skills between film and writing will provide a concrete approach to helping pupils develop their understanding of structure and cohesion, audience and purpose, grammar and lexis, which will enable participating pupils to become more successful writers.

Method: Include sample, design, measures, intervention, process evaluation and analysis

Sample

The total cohort will be drawn from five primary schools across Lincolnshire, two of whom have participated in a version of this programme before (different children will participate). The sample will be formed of all Year 5 pupils in these schools (approximately 150 pupils).

Participating schools will anonymise the pupils in the control and intervention groups, but will asterisk the intervention group, so they can be identified at the end of the project.

Assignment to condition

Eight Year 5 pupils from each school (40 in total) will be randomly selected to participate in the after-school intervention in addition to their normal curriculum-based literacy programme. They will follow the intervention programme between November 2017 and May 2018. The rest of the Year 5 cohort in each school (approximately 110 pupils) will form the control group who will follow their normal curriculum-based literacy programme.

Innovation

The innovation is described in the 'innovation' section above. Pupils in the intervention group will participate in after-school film clubs for seven months between November 2017 and May 2018.

In November 2017, teachers participating in the after-school intervention will have an initial CPD session, introducing the programme. The after-school cohort will follow a structured week-by-week programme, to ensure some degree of commonality of approach. The resources, materials and course design will be common to the intervention group, so teachers will use the same film clips, exercises and activities.

Christine Whitney, the Programme Convenor, will visit each school three times between November and March, to support teachers with ongoing PD, and help ensure teachers are able to follow the programme at roughly the same pace, and use broadly the same teaching approaches, while at the same time noting any variation in approach, which may later be used to account for variations in outcome. Observations of intervention sessions will be carried out by the project convenor as part of the ongoing PD and to maintain fidelity across the intervention cohort.

Outcome measures

All children in the cohort will produce three pieces of narrative writing over the course of the year in September 2017, February 2018 and May 2018. Writing will be blind assessed by independent evaluators for evidence of achievement of Year 5 Text and Sentence objectives (2014 National Curriculum Expected Standard in Writing) which state that by the end of Year 5, pupils should be able to:

- structure and organise a range of texts effectively, identifying the audience and purpose of the writing
- use knowledge gained from stories, plays, poetry and non-fiction to facilitate writing
- apply their knowledge of punctuation and grammar concepts (as set out in the national curriculum) in their independent writing
- write effective descriptions.

The narrative writing produced in September 2017 will establish a baseline of all pupils' abilities as narrative writers.

In February 2018, close to half-term, all children in the cohort will produce a second piece of narrative writing. A random sample of 30 scripts (15 from the control group and 15 from the intervention group), will be analysed blind to gauge progress and development in writing skills and text level understanding. The make-up of this sample will be analysed to ensure these pupils are representative of their groups.

In the final half-term, towards the end of May, all children will produce a final piece of narrative writing. The writing of all pupils in the sample will be blind reviewed again, and compared to their

previous piece of work. An anonymised profile will be produced for each child in the cohort, characterising any change or development in writing ability. The scripts of the sample of 30 children randomly chosen in February will be subject to a more detailed blind analysis to gauge any development in narrative writing over the programme period.

Process analysis

In September/ October the after-school intervention group will be interviewed to establish the degree of their meta-cognitive understanding of narrative form and structure. The children will be given 'film journals' to reflect on their ongoing work on the project, and their developing understanding of narrative, story, and film. Participating teachers will also be given reflective journals and a structured timescale for considering any change or development in their children's growing understanding of narrative. The intervention programme will require all teachers and pupils to 'free-write' in their reflective journals for five minutes at the end of each session in a 'drop everything and write' session. Reflective journal writing will be a clear expectation of participants in the intervention, and the convenor and the evaluator will ask to see the journals when visiting participating schools.

Christine Whitney, the Programme Convenor, will carry out observations of after-school sessions during her visits to the school. As well as informing ongoing professional development, the observations will be used to monitor fidelity in delivery of the intervention.

Analyses

Out of a total cohort of 150, attainment data will be gathered for all pupils, more in-depth attainment data on a sample of 30 pupils and qualitative data on the intervention group of 40 pupils.

Attainment data

Gain scores between the control and intervention groups will be analysed using the baseline (September 2017) and the third piece of work (May 2018). From this data an effect size will be calculated using the EEF convention outlined in the EEF DIY Guidance.

Process analysis

The journals will initially be analysed using an inductive approach, generating a set of codes to inform a final analytical framework. Each journal will then be analysed according to this analytical framework which will enable detailed comparison across the sample of journal entries. The first sweep of the data will be informed by a review of contemporary literature on children's and

teacher's writing and the nature and extent to which writing is influenced or informed by other narrative forms such as film. This will enable us to look beyond what the contemporary curriculum requires of children's writing and to understand in greater depth the particular qualities and characteristics of the work in the journals. This qualitative and research-informed approach will ensure we do not miss qualities in children's writing which are valued in current professional and creative contexts and in particular that we identify instances where film is evident as a resource in writing so that we can reflect further on the context and impact of this in relation to how writing is formally assessed.

The writing of the children in the intervention group will be triangulated with their reflective journals, and the observations of their teachers, to see if any change is visible in their own reflections.

**Conclusion: What will happen if your innovation improves outcomes, or not?
What are the limitations of your evaluation?**

If the intervention is successful, we will look at it as 'evidence of promise'. Further research would be needed to establish whether a similar intervention might be beneficial in curriculum time.

We will encourage organisations such as BFI, UK film education organisation Into Film, the UK Literacy Association, and the Media Education Association, to take the findings and disseminate them nationally, through a series of publications, seminars and training events. Examples of events could include:

- presentations at UKLA National and International conferences (July 2018)
- BFI Media conference (July 2018)
- BFI bespoke seminar on film and literacy
- Understanding Cinema at the Edinburgh International Film Festival (June 2018).

We understand that even if the project is successful, this is just a pilot, with a number of potential limiting factors that would caution against over claiming:

- the project is not a fully-fledged 'impact study'
- the cohort is predominantly rural in context, and so is geographically specific
- the participating schools are of different sizes, so the attainment data from larger schools might skew the evidence
- a positive impact might derive from the fact that as an after-school intervention, pupils are

being giving more literacy support per se.

BFI's education partner Into Film has expressed an interest in following the project, and in considering the outcomes for its own work in schools. Into Film, BFI and ACE Bridge organisation for Yorkshire Cape UK are exploring a film/literacy impact study to take to EEF in 2018, and if the outcomes from this study are positive, they will become a part of the case presented to EEF in support of such a study.

If the outcomes from this study are not positive, then we will use the qualitative data to identify 'other stories to tell', which may be more anecdotal, or limited to only one or two schools.

References

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