Using boxing up (Talk for writing) strategies to improve story structure

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Summary

What were your reasons for doing this type of development work?

When first introduced to Talk for writing I could immediately see how it would begin to fit into my classroom. After already working hard to introduce AFL and within that the use of talk partners I could really see that this would be effective.

I had been concerned for a long time that teachers felt the need to produce writing every lesson - some form of evidence. As literacy co-ordinator in school I had been trying to push the message forward that this wasn't the case. Talk for writing was therefore the perfect vehicle.

I was particularly interested in story planning and writing. As so often the children lost their way and couldn't sustain plot and structure and as a consequence became bored and disinterested. This often left me feeling that I wasn't teaching them well enough or giving them enough guidance. Also at this time I had a boy heavy class which exaggerated the whole writing issue.

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Who might find this case study useful?

- Teacher

Key points

**Point 1**

Using boxing up to improve story structure

**Point 2**

Engaging and empowering children when planning and writing their own story

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What

**Intentions**

What specific curriculum area, subject or aspect did you intend to have impact on?

- Communication, language and literacy

How did you intend to impact on pupil learning?

My objective was to improve the children’s skills when planning and writing a story, so that their stories had a clear structure which they were confident about following.
Ultimately that they had ownership of the process.

What were your success criteria?

- Children could take a story and identify the key events
- That they could then familiarise these events
- That they could then use the familiarisation to plan their own story
- That their own story would have a clear structure which they were confident in using

PLEASE NOTE this page has three tabs - click 'Next tab' below or use tabs above to see Teaching approaches and CPD approaches

What information or data did you use to measure progress towards your success criteria?

- Logs or interviews
- Observation outcomes
- Pupils’ work

Teaching approaches

What did you do? What teaching approaches (pedagogy) did you use to achieve the intended impact?

- Assessment for Learning (AfL)
- Collaborative group work
- Independent learning
- Other
- Self assessment and peer assessment
- Use of pupil talk for whole-class teaching

Describe the teaching approaches you used

Phase 1

I was very interested in the idea of retelling familiar stories, learning them off by heart and then producing a story map including actions. So many children no longer know traditional stories as a matter of course.
We read ‘The three little pigs’ together. The children retold the story in pairs – babble gabble. We then worked together to create actions to help with the retelling. This then led us to identify the key points in the story. We repeated this with other stories, each time identifying the key events. We then ‘boxed up’ the events putting them in a flow chart. From this we were able to generalise the events and innovate the story. This seemed to make sense to the children; they enjoyed it and found it ‘easy’.

**Moving into phase 2**

We were now ready to move on and look at myths. Within this stage we listened to myths, read quality text (Book talk). We used drama techniques such as hot seating, freeze frame etc. The children spent time discussing why the author used certain words and phrases. We collected words for future use. They spent time familiarising themselves with the key characters in Norse myths and their attributes.

The next stage was to practise our techniques of retelling stories and then boxing them up. We took a simple myth, learnt it, retold it and then identified the key events or bare bones as we began to call them. As a consequence of their previous work the children found this task straightforward. I modelled initially and then they were able to carry the process into small groups using another myth.

I then chose a myth with a straightforward structure and with key characters present. I explained that this was the myth that we were going to base the structure of our own myth upon. We spent time learning the story, retelling it. We identified the key events and boxed it up. We also at this stage made a simple board game which retold the story. The ‘good’ events and characters would mean extra moves forward and vice versa. This really helped to clarify the story structure and continued to keep enthusiasm going and interest in the myth.

**Moving into phase 3**

We now had our myth boxed up. The key events were in place and we now worked together to generalise them. The children again could do this with help as it linked back to previous work. I modelled changing characters and situations whilst still remaining within the same structure. (Innovation)

We produced our own class plan for a new myth. We rehearsed the structure and ensured that any there weren’t any unanswered questions. The children
were then able to plan their own myth. The extent of innovation depended on ability. They spent a long time talking their plan through with their partner. They asked ‘Tell me more?’ to encourage real thought about characters and situations. They hot seated any new characters. These activities were all modelled initially using the class myth.

We were now finally ready to write! The children were eager and confident. They knew their story, the beginning, the middle and the end. They could retell it orally. Many had already started writing it at home and I actually had to slow them down because they were so eager.

Obviously here we spent time redrafting. Rehearsing sentences/paragraphs. Finding new, better words. Using our talk partner for advice and suggestions. My role as a teacher in terms of marking and providing improvement prompts was much easier than previously. This was due to the fact that everybody’s story, although different had the same bones. I didn’t have to try and follow a convoluted path trying to work out what was happening in their story before I could offer any advice. Quality conversations and guided writing took place and next steps were clear and focused.

Upload

Literacy Plan - Myths and Legends (DOC-134 KB) Attachments
Literacy Plan - Myths and Legends 2 (DOC-108 KB) Attachments
Myths check list (DOC-575 KB) Attachments
Six boxes - planning my own myth using the structure of a known myth (DOC-28 KB) Attachments
To create a flow chart to tell the story of a myth

CPD approaches

What did you do? What approaches to CPD and learning for adults were used?

- Coaching
- Demonstration
- Learning conversation
- Modelling
- Training
Describe the CPD approaches you used

- Staff meeting to share initial ideas
- INSET to further develop ideas which including modelling
- Learning conversations happened on a regular basis although in informal circumstances

What CPD materials, research or expertise have you drawn on?

Talk for writing DVD (Pie Corbett)
http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/node/152632

Talk for writing development group external to school (LEA consultant led)

Talk for writing http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/node/154519

Who provided you with support?

- External agency

How were you supported?

A group of six teachers were offered the opportunity to receive training concerning Talk for writing across the authority. We met on three occasions where we both received training and fed back our own findings. The teachers came from across Key Stages 1 and 2 so giving everyone a clear insight of where successes and failures took place.

Node information
Attachments Zip:
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File Attachments

- Literacy Plan - Myths and Legends (doc 134 KB)
- Literacy Plan - Myths and Legends 2 (doc 109 KB)
- Myths check list (doc 575 KB)
- Six boxes - planning my own myth using the structure of a known myth (doc 29 KB)
- To create a flow chart to tell the story of a myth (doc 28 KB)
Impact

On pupil learning

What has been the overall impact on pupil learning?

The children have all published their own myth. The quality of the writing has improved but what is most significant is the structure. All the class including those who need a high level of support have produced a myth with a clear beginning, middle and end. They are all incredibly proud of them, many dragging parents in to read them as they have been talking about their work at home. Parents have commented on their enthusiasm and how impressed they are to hear them talking about writing in such a positive way.

The children feel in control!

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An example of a child's boxing up of a myth (PDF-349 KB) Attachments

Thoughts you think are relevant to overall impact on learning

As a teacher I felt the unit had been a great success. I had spent a long time getting ready for writing and had in fact gone over the 4 weeks suggested by the framework as we had spent so much time in the early phases. I had much more control over the product and had felt that my teaching had improved and become more focused. The method of boxing up the key events and then generalising them to use as a structure made so much sense. I am not sure what I really did before! I have also gone on to use this method with the same children in a non-fiction unit and it worked just as well.

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Information text boxing up (PDF-322 KB) Attachments
Persuasive argument boxing up (PDF-739 KB) Attachments
Pictorial story retelling (PDF-545 KB) Attachments

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Quotes you think are relevant to overall impact on learning

"He's been so eager to write - he's started at home! I've never seen him so enthusiastic." Parent

"I know what is happening in my story and I will finish it!" Lower ability boy.

"The children have all really enjoyed learning fairy tales and boxing them up." Teaching assistant.

Upload

Generalisation of traditional tale (PDF-271 KB) Attachments

Quantitative evidence of impact on pupil learning

- Periodic teacher assessment

Qualitative evidence of impact on pupil learning

- Logs or interviews
- Observation outcomes
- Pupils' work

Describe the evidence of impact on pupil learning

The children no longer find the idea of story writing daunting. After boxing up the story and then using this to help them plan they have a clear focus. They no longer lose their way after beginning their writing and as a consequence are more able to concentrate on all the other aspects of the story e.g vocabulary, sentence structure, connectives etc.

Their end of year results (Optional tests in our case) show that most children are on track for National Expectations. However we aim for above expectations as our children arrive from our infant feeder school with generally high scores. It is difficult to state at this stage if the Talk for Writing strategies used have had impact, however our overall Key Stage 2 results show good progress.
On teaching

What has been the impact on teaching?

Staff feel more confident when teaching story writing and are enjoying using whole texts where they may not have done before! Teaching is more focused as once the children have planned their story they feel so much more secure. As all children are following a similar story structure marking and assessment has greater meaning. Also more quality marking and feedback can take place within a set time as there is no unravelling of where the children are in their story.

This method also provides an easy and clear way to differentiate for children as the less able can just retell the story with limited changes rising up to full innovation. (Differentiated success criteria)

This method has been extended to other genres. (see attachments)
Thoughts you think are relevant to impact on teaching

The use of Talk for writing and in particular the method of boxing up has increased confidence when teaching writing.

Quotes you think are relevant to the impact on teaching

"I know what is happening in my story and I will finish it." Lower ability boy.

Upload

Haunted house boxing up (PDF-547 KB) Attachments

Evidence of impact on teaching

- Evidence from observation and monitoring
- Evidence from planning
- Teacher perceptions

Describe the evidence of impact on teaching

There were many positive conversations in the staffroom about the effectiveness of talk for writing and in particular the boxing up method. Teacher's were keen to share their successes. So the impact was not just about the talk for writing but the fact that it encouraged professional dialogue because everyone felt interested and motivated.

On school organisation and leadership

What has been the impact on school organisation and leadership?

Talk for writing and the boxing up method have been embedded across the school. Staff no longer use a story mountain and there is consistency across all year groups. When the class I had initially trialled the methods on moved up to Year 4 they were confident in using that method and that training helped the next teacher deliver their first narrative genre.
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Man on the Moon literacy plan

Thoughts you think are relevant to overall impact on school organisation and leadership

The use of ‘Talk for writing' and the method of boxing up do not require drastic changes to the delivery of literacy. Much of it is just good practice. However for many teachers a classroom where children talk to learn can be quite threatening. The senior management team need to support people’s efforts and encourage the sharing of good practice. This includes giving over staff meeting time and the opportunity for peer observations. Much of recent development in schools has been taken over by the focus on assessment however sharing good practice concerning teaching and learning will only move the school forwards.

Quotes you think are relevant to overall impact on school organisation and leadership

"You seem confident and secure when discussing your delivery of writing." SIP

"There is a more defined focus when story writing." Headteacher

Evidence of impact on school organisation and leadership

Talk for writing and boxing up is evident in literacy planning. Talk for writing tools have been given a place to be recorded on the generic plan.

The implementation of Talk for writing was part of the school improvement plan to ensure whole school consistency.

Node information
Attachments Zip:
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File Attachments

- An example of a child's boxing up of a myth ( pdf 349 KB )
Summary

What is the crucial thing that made the difference?

Staff's willingness to have a go and the fact that it 'made sense and worked' for both the children and staff.

What key resources would people who want to learn from your experience need access to?

- Talk for writing DVD (Pie Corbett)
  [http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/node/152632](http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/node/152632)
- Examples of planning included
- Further planning and resources are available via email request

What CPD session and resources were particularly useful?

The talk for writing DVD provides many resources and ideas for CPD as does the strategy site.
[http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/node/154519](http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/node/154519)
If another individual or school was attempting to replicate this work, where would they start and what would the essential elements be?

- The starting point is learning traditional stories and retelling. Then using these stories to create new ones.
- Watching the DVD would be essential and then giving staff time to have a go and then share and reflect.

What further developments are you planning to do (or would you like to see others do)?

We are now using Talk for writing across the school and boxing up is used for both fiction and non-fiction. We have recently began using the idea for picture books where words are limited. This is something we would like to explore further (see attachment).

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Tuesday - planning

File Attachments

- Tuesday - planning (doc 193 KB)