Diving for Pearls

action research to improve literacy outcomes in the Reception Year

by Rebecca Fisk
This action research project is part of an Early Years Literacy Network devised and facilitated by Rebecca Fisk, Lead Early Years Consultant for the North Somerset Early Years and Childcare Service.

Our thanks to the participating schools and teachers:

- Banwell Primary School  **Sarah Kent**
- Becket Primary School  **Michelle Channon**
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- Worle Village Primary School  **Alan Milne**
- Wraxall Church of England Primary School  **Tamsin Hayward**

Thanks also to Mead Vale Primary School who took part in the first year of the project.

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Abstract

‘Diving for Pearls’ outlines a two year action research project with Early Years Foundation Stage teachers in North Somerset Council between September 2015 and July 2017. The Literacy Network Project was designed and facilitated by Rebecca Fisk, an Early Years Consultant with the local authority.

It focuses on the enjoyment of teaching and learning and the role of play in enhancing children’s outcomes in speaking, reading and writing.

A wide variety of research methods were used to gather both qualitative and quantitative data from the children, parents and teachers, in particular, teacher case studies have been central in the telling of their stories of improvement and changes made within their practice and thinking. 180 children were selected by the teachers over two years, who displayed lower than age related expectations in their literacy development on arrival at school, and their progress was closely monitored.

The data results show that the majority of the children in the study were boys and that in both years over 60% of children made rapid or better progress in speaking, over 56% in reading and 47% in writing. This rate of progress is very significant. The case studies demonstrate how the teachers facilitated this rapid progress.

Nine key themes emerged from the project which are explored by the facilitator.

A new action research model has also been developed, with the metaphor of diving for pearls.
A word about the author:

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Rebecca Fisk qualified as a teacher in 1991, with a career spanning 22 years in Somerset, UK. She specialised in teaching in the Early Years, including Nurseries, Children’s Centres and Schools. She developed her skills as a Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) co-ordinator with a particular interest in language development, leading to gaining her M(Ed) degree in 2013. Moving into education consultancy has enabled her to work with a wider range of early years teachers, and develop the Literacy Network Project with North Somerset Council, where she currently leads on inclusion for vulnerable groups for the early years. (January 2018)

_Michael Loader_ (www.somersetstoryfest.co.uk | foolworks@yahoo.co.uk)

Michael is a professional story teller who has over 25 years of experience working in education and the arts. Michael works with all ages and welcomes the spirit of play and curiosity. He has worked with schools, theatres, corporations and festivals to name a few bringing humour and participation to storytelling.

Dedication

_To the teachers in the project:_ In the spirit of the word games we played during the network, if you change the order of the letters in the word ‘pearly’ into the word ‘re-play’ it can remind you that when you re-connect with your playfulness you can make something that is collectively precious in the classroom. The meaning-making and gleam of play can become visible in both your teaching and learning. Thank you for shining.

_To Michael Loader:_ Thank you for helping us find our quest.

_To all of the North Somerset Early Years and Childcare Service team:_ Thank you for listening and encouraging me to see this through.

_To Liz Carlier:_ For being my reflective friend and editor - thank you for helping me breathe!

_To Andrew, Isabella and Caitlin at home:_ Thank you for keeping me afloat.
Glossary

**EAL** English as an Additional Language

**ELG** Early Learning Goal

**EYFS** Early Years Foundation Stage

**EYFSP** Early Years Foundation Stage Profile

**EYPP** Early Years Pupil Premium

**FS** Foundation Stage

**FSM** Free School Meals

**GLD** Good Level of Development

**HLTA** Higher Level Teaching Assistant

**LSA** Learning Support Assistant

**NQT** Newly Qualified Teacher

**NS** North Somerset

**PP** Pupil premium

**SEND** Special Educational Needs and Disability

**TA** Teaching Assistant

**YR** Year Reception
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Diving for Pearls
Instead of diving for dear life
we should be diving for pearls.

The research model and metaphor explained

In facilitating the Early Years Literacy Network project, a research model has evolved, which will be described through a ‘story’ narrative, using the imagery and metaphor of diving for pearls.

At the start of the project it seemed that some of the teachers were struggling to ‘stay afloat’ in teaching with top-down pressures and lower than average literacy outcomes at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. It could be said that they were hanging on for ‘dear life’ and finding the occasional raft or lifejacket to keep them from going under. This may seem somewhat dramatic, but throughout the two year project there were times when most of the teachers reported that they were struggling with a balance between their professional and personal lives, and that they had considered leaving the profession. With increased numbers nationally leaving the profession in recent years they were not alone with their frustrations and exhaustion.

Staying with the metaphor, the network meetings appeared to begin to offer some of the teachers a ‘life-line’, a way of taking a deep in-breath before going back to school to dive deeper into teaching and learning to search for what would make the difference to the children’s outcomes within their own context or ocean. Imagine the teacher researcher searching within their own practice for a greater knowledge of their own teaching, as a diver searches the sea bed for oysters with pearls. Each oyster can be said to be an, as yet, unknown part of the action research process, a closed part of the depths of knowledge that ocean life or pedagogy offers. The research model begins here.

Reluctant Researcher

The first stage is where the beginnings of a research idea takes place, where a small intrusive grain of sand or piece of grit gets in the oyster shell, as a niggling thought that demands attention, that irritates and requires a response. This can be seen to be the start of the project, where the researcher is reluctant on some level, not signing up to the project by choice but by direction from school leaders following local authority invitations, but has an irritating doubt that something needs to change to improve outcomes for children. Despite being thrown ‘in at the deep end’ into the research project the teachers agree to start strengthening their swimming strokes, to start exploring the ocean of teaching.
Reality Researcher

The next stage of the model is where the teachers accept the reality of being in the action research project, and start to look through a ‘different pair of lenses’ (Clough & Nutbrown, 2007) to gain more clarity on their teaching practice. The teachers begin to recognise the reality of their classroom practice and think about doing something differently. Staying with the metaphor, they start to clear or change their swimming goggles to get a better view of the ocean they are in. The oyster shell of action research accepts the grain of grit ready to start a process around it.

Responding Researcher

The teachers, in this stage of becoming a researcher, begin to respond to what they have seen differently and start to change practice overtly, they become increasingly reflective about their practice and make an intentional response to it. They start to ask questions of themselves and of their own values and how these fit into the context of their school. Again, with the metaphor, this is where quite a dramatic change begins to take place, as the oyster has accepted the irritable intrusion and begins to respond to it by producing nacre, the layers of shiny substance which form a membrane repeatedly around the grit. This becomes the formation of a unique pearl, with each layer building up with its individual colours or properties emerging. The action research begins to embed changes, and the teachers begin to build layers of understanding, like the layers of nacre, and become researchers. They start to create their own learning and knowing, their own ‘pearls’ of wisdom, layering their thinking. They are not only now doing research but are being part of the research, as their identity as a researcher is changing (Twinley, 2016). Not only are they diving for pearls, but have begun cultivating pearls of their own.

Re-telling or Raconteur Researcher

The teachers showcase their developing pearls of wisdom or new learning within the network and at a professional conference, allowing them to re-count or re-tell their story and journey so far. Their action research narrative starts to be illuminated to others, they are ‘becoming’ a researcher (Twinley, 2016) in the eyes of the profession, sharing theories and practice and the knowledge gained. Using the metaphor this is when the oyster is opened by the teacher allowing others to see the learning, the rich, iridescence pearl of wisdom within. The value of the pearl is further enriched by allowing others to view it; it has come into its own, it has become a gem.

Recognised or Revealed Researcher

This stage of the action research is where the teachers recognise themselves fully as practitioner-researchers, celebrating that they have gained new knowledge which they have shared with other professionals. They have consolidated their learning into their
autobiographical research narratives, demonstrating the change to their thinking about teaching and learning, the change to themselves. (Cotterell, 2016) They now belong in a community of recognised researchers, their work is in the public domain, and has revealed to themselves and others their learning. ‘Research has the power to facilitate re-connection to a sense of self’ (Twinley, 2016). Using the metaphor, the nature of the pearl is now clear for all to see, its value is known and illuminated, insights into its fineness revealed, its rarity recognised.

Resonating Researcher

The teachers themselves built on the research model and extended it one step further as follows. Not only has research the power to connect with the self, it also has the power to ripple into the practice of others, to reverberate and resonate further than the context in which is it carried out. Each teacher’s research has the potential to affect another practitioner and their practice, and the power to effect change. The patina or sheen of the teachers’ pearls of wisdom have the ability to radiate outwards revealing the research to others. The meaning made from the ‘world within’ the researcher can influence the ‘world without’ (Isaacs, 1932) and likewise, the world without has been viewed differently by the teachers, revealing the colours and substance of the world within themselves. The teachers are now not only the divers, searching for deeper pedagogical understanding, having opened their action research oyster, found the essence of teacher self, the pearl of enhanced practice and theory, they become a person of great value, and highly prized.

‘Message in a bottle’

As a message to the teachers, the facilitator hopes that they can swim and dive safely in what is a sometimes turbulent ocean. They now know how to take the deep sustaining breaths needed to stay afloat, whilst searching for meaning in their teaching. The learning collectively created through the Early Years Literacy Network project can be used to anchor the teachers going forward within their own reflective practice. They now have the skills to grow pearls around new irritants, find the connections between theory and practice, re-evaluate their pedagogy, and prize themselves highly. They can make their value visible to others.

References

Cotterell, P. (7th September 2016) Discussion lead on *Autobiographical Research Reflecting on Researcher/Respondent Identities* University of Plymouth A/B Symposium Event

Twinley, B. (7th September 2016) *Developing My Research Through the understanding of the other: Doing, Being: Becoming: Belonging* Presentation and Discussion at Reflecting on Researcher/Respondent Identities University of Plymouth A/B Symposium Event.
In at the deep end

Project Outline, Rationale and Purpose

The North Somerset Early Years Literacy Network Project was an action research project undertaken by North Somerset Council Early Years and Childcare Service and a small group of Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Reception class teachers in local primary schools. It took place between September 2015 and August 2017, covering two academic school years.

The research questions asked by North Somerset Council were twofold:

*How can supporting Early Years Foundation Stage teachers to enhance their classroom provision by focusing on the enjoyment of speaking, reading and writing significantly raise children’s outcomes for those who enter school below age related expectations?*

*How can an action research approach facilitate change in teacher practice in order to enable children to progress rapidly towards age related expectations in speaking, reading and writing?*

Vision for Literacy 2025 as a project motivator

The Literacy Network Project was inspired by research from the National Literacy Forum entitled ‘Vision for Literacy 2025’ urging educators to take immediate action to reverse the trend of underachievement in literacy, especially for children and young people living in poverty. Their vision includes all children reaching the expected level in early language and literacy development aged 5 by 2020.

Vision for Literacy 2025 states that ‘the UK is the only economically developed country where 16-24 year olds have the lowest literacy skills of any age group in society’ with figures equating to 5.1 million people, ‘creating obstacles to fairness across society’ and a ‘divided society’. (National Literacy Forum, 2014:2).

Four pathways are outlined to universal literacy as follows (pp 4-10):

- Improve early language and literacy provision in homes and early years settings
- More effective teaching of reading, writing and spoken skills in schools
- Universal access to reading materials and programmes required to ensure that children read for enjoyment
- Partnerships between education and business need to be enacted to ensure that all school leavers have literacy fit for employment.
They also refer to more effective teaching of reading and writing including the importance of spoken language as well as comprehension skills, the home environment and they make clear links between children reading for enjoyment and achievement.

**Read On: Get On Campaign as project motivator**

In addition, the ‘Read On: Get On’ campaign was launched by Save the Children with the paper ‘Ready to Read’ stating that ‘one third of all children growing up in poverty are unable to read well when they leave primary school’ and that ‘the impact on their life chances is likely to be dramatic’ (2015: iv).

The report goes on to say that in England ‘almost one in four children (23%) does not meet the expected level of language development by the age of five’ and this early delay has ‘profound consequences for a child’s ability to be able to get on at school’. (2015: v)

The report notes that the effect of delayed language skills at five has an even greater impact on later achievement for those living in poverty and that ‘while poverty can make it much harder, there is no excuse for accepting underachievement among our poorest children’ (2015: v).

These two strong research papers inspired the start of North Somerset Council Early Years and Childcare Service responding to the research themes, in particular addressing the enjoyment of literacy.

The Literacy Network Project was designed to target a group of schools where their Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP) data in 2014-2015 for five year olds, specifically in the aspects of speaking, reading and writing, were lower than the national average or North Somerset average. Action research was used as a method to develop teacher skills in reflective practice and allow opportunities for schools to investigate a specific focus relevant to their context.

North Somerset Council invited 12 selected schools in total to join the Early Years Literacy Network Project. 11 schools took up the offer, with 12 teachers participating in the first year. One school left the project after the first year.

**Aims of the Early Years Literacy Network Project**

The aims of the project were two fold focusing on both children’s outcomes and teachers’ professional development. Firstly, relating to the enjoyment of developing speaking, reading and writing skills to improve outcomes and secondly relating to specific action research to be undertaken by the teachers into their own classroom practice to enhance children’s rate of progress. These overarching aims have been broken down for clarity as follows:
• To identify ‘target’ children starting school at below age related expectations in speaking, reading and writing specifically.
• To challenge teachers to enable the children to progress rapidly towards age related expectations by the end of their Reception year in the EYFS.
• To narrow the attainment gap between all EYFSP pupils and those in the schools lowest 20% in the end of the Reception year EYFSP outcomes.
• To support teachers to learn from each other through a learning community of enquiry by facilitating network meetings.
• To support teacher expertise and further knowledge through encouraging them to undertake small scale action research to share with colleagues through both a showcase to peers and an autobiographical case study.
• To support teachers to foster high quality classroom talk and story-telling in order to promote narrative and enhance reading and writing development.
• To support teachers to immerse children in a literacy rich environment.
• To support teachers to facilitate parental engagement in their child’s literacy development.
• To share current research for teachers to consider, apply to practice, and develop their own pedagogy.

In addition, the project rationale was underpinned by many aspects of the teacher standards for England (DfE 2012) but in particular:

• Promote a love of learning and children’s intellectual curiosity (Standard 4)
• Contribute to the design and provision of an engaging curriculum within the relevant subject areas (Standard 4)
• Be accountable for children’s attainment, progress and outcomes (Standard 2)
• Be aware of pupils capabilities and their prior knowledge, and plan teaching to build on these (Standard 2)
• Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of how pupils learn and how this impacts on teaching (Standard 2)
• Demonstrate an awareness of the physical, social and intellectual development of children, and know how to adapt teaching to support pupils’ education at different stages of development (Standard 5)
• Take responsibility for improving teaching through appropriate professional development, responding to advice and feedback from colleagues (Standard 8)

The Literacy Network Project also aimed to demonstrate an evidence-based piece of work which has facilitated teachers’ professional development, showing how teachers have had an impact on children’s outcomes in speaking, reading and writing through their action research case studies. Fittingly, the autobiographical case studies place teachers’ narratives at the heart of the literacy project.
References

Department for Education (2012) Teachers’ Standards (for England)  


Research Methods - discovery and ‘knowing’ to bring about change

‘Research is about discovery’ (Rolfe & MacNaughton, 2001:8)

The research methodology of the Early Years Literacy Network Project was somewhat unconventional in that the researchers did not instigate their own participation. Does this invalidate the research in some way or, in fact, enhance the journey they have undertaken to be part of it? This unusual beginning has unexpectedly given rise to a new research model explained in the chapter entitled ‘Diving for Pearls’.

What did we do?

Research invitation to selected schools

Schools were selected and invited to join the North Somerset Early Years Literacy Network project by using their school Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP) data as compared to North Somerset’s and National for the 2014-2015 cohort of Reception children.

Schools were selected based on whether they had reached the national level in 2014-2015 of 66.2% of children achieving a Good Level of Development (GLD) at the end of the EYFS and the percentage of children reaching the Early Learning Goals (ELG) in speaking, reading and writing. In addition, the school’s inequality gap measure between the lowest achieving 20% and all children was taken into consideration.

Schools were invited with the following outline:

• The project would offer opportunities for teachers to engage with the most up-to-date evidence and research on children’s developing reading and writing skills. It would encourage teachers to then design strategies to apply this to their own class in pioneering ways.

• There would be local authority funding for supply cover for one Reception teacher for all network meetings (x4 annually for two years) and events.

• Each network session would be from 1:30-4:30pm to allow for travel time from schools after a morning of teaching. There was a clear expectation that all sessions should be attended, and funds for supply cover would only be released following attendance at a network meeting.
The Early Years Literacy Network Project was underpinned by the premise that schools are best placed to identify their own needs and then to put in place the strategies to improve teaching. (Kiely, 2015)

**Methodology — How did we do it?**
Multiple methods of gathering evidence for this project were used encompassed within an action research approach.

**Action Research Approach**
An action research approach was chosen for a number of reasons:

- its flexibility across school contexts, allowing a school specific focus
- its application to action by teachers and bringing about change to practice to aim to better children’s outcomes
- its cyclical characteristic of reflection on practice which could integrate into a series of network meetings over two years

MacNaughton (2001:208) outlines that action research is about researching with people to create and study change in and through the research process. Based on the EYFSP data, the local authority view that underpinned the research was that something had to change in these schools in order for children to achieve higher outcomes in literacy at the end of their Reception year. This stance gave rise to the design of the project, supported by national research.

Action research processes take time and it therefore lent itself as a suitable method for a two year project. MacNaughton (2001:211) goes on to outline the repeating cycle of action research as follows:

- Observing
- Planning actions based on these observations
- Implementing planned actions
- Reflecting on what happens
- Sharing with others
- Collaboratively reflecting on what has been learnt
- Building theories to guide further action
- Re planning
- Implementing
- Observing
- Reflecting
Critical reflection is a fundamental part of the integrity of action research (MacNaughton, 2001:212). Critical reflection was facilitated within the eight network meetings through the RED process (reflect, exchange, develop) at the centre of each meeting. These network meeting processes supported a collaborative approach to critical reflection, as did the opportunity for teachers to showcase their work to a wider audience at the North Somerset Early Years Conference in February 2017.

The network meetings enabled the facilitator and teachers to come together to discuss, learn, think and re-think, ask questions and collaborate on developing shared understandings. Each teacher worked within their specific school context in between these meetings, pursuing their actions in practice, carrying out gap tasks, and documenting this. The project format was likened to ‘breathing in, and breathing out’ over time (Carlier, 2017)

This can be interpreted in two ways. Firstly, the school specific work being the ‘in’ breath (within the school) where teachers harnessed their energies and practice to make changes, and the network meetings being the ‘out’ breath (without/outside the school) where teachers could ‘breathe out’ their thinking and learning to others. This intake and output of breath sustained the action research process. Secondly, this can also be viewed in reverse, where the network meetings facilitated a deep ‘in’ breath of new thinking and collaborative energy to then breathe ‘out’ into the school and classroom environment. Either way, it is a useful metaphor to emphasise the sustained support to practice that the network process gave as breathing gives to living. The researchers take deep breaths to enable diving for their pedagogical pearls.

Action research can be said to be where practitioners are active participants in the research and where the gap between theory and practice illuminates an educational problem. (Carr & Kemis, 1986) The network meetings presented theory to the practitioners and this led to an exploration of theory in their own practice, resulting in the focus of their case study.

“All researchers need to see their topic with new and different lenses, in order to look beyond and transform their current knowledge....what distinguishes research from everyday curiosity however is the opening up of familiar things to alternative ways of seeing...systematically informed by perspectives outside of the researcher’s normal vision’. (Clough & Nutbrown, 2007:24)

The network meetings aimed to bring new or different things into the teachers’ field of vision so they could choose to look through a different lens or different perspective at their practice.
Empowering teachers through action research was fundamental to the project. The action research aimed to use the EYSFP data as a launch for the project, carefully balanced with reassuring the teachers about their role in improving outcomes through increasing their understanding of the issues around literacy development for them, their school, their cohort of children, and the many implications for their teaching in practice and evolving pedagogy.

Theoretical Perspective

The theoretical perspective of the Literacy Network Project is interpretive. Interpretive research is a belief that we continually create and construct our social world by negotiating with others the meanings of our actions (MacNaughton et al., 2001 cited in Roberts-Holmes, 2005:40).

The methodology used strongly influences this perspective, as the validity of the research is grounded in the truths of the teachers as they see it, which they have drawn from their observations of children’s learning in their classroom. The power of this research tradition is in the detail, complexity and authenticity of the evidence. Hughes, (2001, cited in Roberts-Holmes 2005:40) says that, for interpretivists, knowledge is valid if it is the authentic and true voice of the participants. For interpretivists, the social world is not just ‘out there’ waiting to be interpreted, but ‘in here’ or ‘in us’ — it is our interpretations. (MacNaughton et al. 2001:35)

In this project the authentic knowledge gained within the teachers’ social world can be linked to the breathing metaphor with the ‘in’ breath (within breath) being that which the teachers take in from their own practice or truth.

Collection of Quantitative and Qualitative Evidence

The combination of methods used to gather evidence in the Literacy Network Project were multiple, varied and extensive.

All action research projects generate an enormous volume of material (MacNaughton 2001:216) and this results in the researcher choosing data that helps to throw light on the research question, thereby omitting other data in order to maintain manageability. This, however, can impact on the validity (MacNaughton 2001:216) which is why the strong triangulation of data in this study, both quantitative and qualitative consolidates the validity by viewing the evidence through a variety of different evidence ‘lenses’.

Both qualitative and quantitative research methods have been chosen in order to shed light on findings from both angles, aiming to achieve greater insight into the Literacy Network Project and its outcomes, for children and teachers. Gorard & Taylor (2004, cited in Newby 2010:126) refer to this mixed method as a ‘paradigm whose time has come’. By triangulating the data from mixed research methods we aim to illuminate the
detail, understanding and meanings drawn from this study, both by the teachers themselves and the facilitator.

It is useful to outline here some of the methodology used in order for the reader to gain a sense of the robustness of the evidence. A more detailed analysis of the relative strengths and limitations of each method can be found in Appendix 1.

**Quantitative**

Quantitative approaches are ‘particularly useful in resolving questions regarding outcomes’ and are ‘powerful, rigorous and convincing to others’. (Newby 2010:114)

Throughout the network various data sources were analysed with the teachers to develop their identification of need for change to practice. This included their on-entry, mid-year and end year EYFS data for the children selected as a target group in each class for all three aspects speaking, reading and writing.

In North Somerset the age related expectation is that children would be ‘working within’ or ‘secure’ in the 40-60 month developmental band in the EYFS when starting school. All children starting school are at least 4 years old (48 months), falling within the 40-60 month age band chronologically. The children selected by the teachers as the project target group were all below age related expectations on entry to school compared to their chronological age.

By measuring the end of year EYFS profile outcomes and comparing them to the children’s starting points (on-entry) it was possible to see what the children had achieved in terms of attainment but also measure their rate of progress. It also allowed comparisons to be made between the first and second year of the project, despite there being a different group of children in the target group each year. (Appendix 2 North Somerset progress measures)

**Qualitative**

Qualitative approaches draw ‘insight’ into the evidence (Newby, 2010:115) and help to ‘surface the struggle’ of learning from the research (Claxton, 2012). This seems fitting with the metaphor of breathing already established where the case studies ‘draw in’ breath for the teachers as they learn more about their practice and how they influence it. Qualitative approaches give guidance but allow researchers considerable freedom of choice. (Newby, 2010:115)

Newby identifies some key characteristics of qualitative research approaches which can be its strength including:

- its holistic nature where different sources can be combined for analysis and interpretation
• its naturalistic emphasis where data can be obtained in as natural a setting as possible – evidence is drawn in this study from the classroom, the teacher – pupil relationships, their thoughts, emotions, ideas and frustrations built into their case studies, allowing their research to be ‘organic’, developing as the project progressed.
• its ability to demonstrate that there is ‘not one reality’, as quantitative data may present, but that the real world has an ‘independent verifiable existence’. (Newby, 2010:116, 117)

**Triangulation of Data – the treasure map**

The triangulation of the data, using a range of methods, adds to the validity of the interpretive research tradition. As several methods were used it strengthens the validity of the project’s research, making the findings more convincing. (Hughes, 2001 cited in Roberts-Holmes 2005:40) The triangulation of the data in fact is a double-triangulation, a little like a treasure map, where data can be found in several places.

![Mapping the evidence diagram]

**Autoethnography**
Three specific qualitative methods at the heart of the research were used placing it firmly within an autoethnographic stance:

1) Network meetings and gap tasks
As part of the reflective cycle the teachers were expected to take part in gap tasks in school between network meetings to develop their learning and thinking in practice. Gap tasks related to speaking, reading or writing in the first year, and to their showcase and case study in the second year of the project. These tasks were an essential part of the network as the teachers fed back each session what they had learnt and discovered. In addition, gap tasks also included some essential reading. Research articles were selected to link to each session and essential reading was given out prior to or during network meetings. Additional optional further reading was also given between each network session.

These were chosen as a vehicle to support continuing professional development throughout the project for several reasons:

- To support teachers and schools to choose their own way forward for their local school community when improving literacy outcomes, whilst drawing on the shared experience of a professional learning community
- To develop leadership in the EYFS in language and literacy provision
- To facilitate good practice and quality first teaching
- To share practical ideas and strategies, based in research
- To build teacher confidence to share their practice and findings with other teachers both in and outside of the network.

2) Professional Learning Logs
Professional learning logs or journals were central to the methodology of the project, despite these generally being kept in the ‘private’ domain. Each teacher, and the facilitator, kept a professional learning log throughout the project. It could be used to record for example, thoughts, actions, and feelings about practice and changes made within the classroom. The teachers were encouraged to take action and record the impact of that action, reflecting on their teaching approach and pedagogy. The process of keeping a professional learning log or journal was aimed to be a vehicle for reflection on their own learning. (Moon 2006:1, cited in Mukherji & Albon, 2010)

‘Journaling enables the researcher to re-enter the same story and reinterpret that story in the light of new understandings and experiences.’ (Mukherji & Albon, 2010:163)

There was deliberate intent to encourage the teachers and the facilitator to see themselves, over time, at the centre of their own research. This method was chosen to facilitate ‘greater insight into their own work’ (Mukherji & Albon, 2010:158). The facilitator hoped that the professional learning log or research journal would be a useful
tool in supporting teachers to engage in their action research and help them develop ‘alternative ways of seeing’ (Clough & Nutbrown, 2007:24), ‘surfacing the struggle of learning’ (Claxton, 2012) both for themselves and the children.

In addition the professional learning logs assisted the teachers to document and tell their story, to ‘establish the authority of the researcher’ and to clarify ‘why they did what they did in the research process.’ (De Vault, 1997, in Mukherji & Albon, 2010: 161)

3) Case study and telling the story
Each teacher was required to carry out their own ‘intrinsic’ action research case study. This method was selected because it was hoped that the insight from within their teaching world or ‘inside the case’ (Edwards, 1997 in MacNaughton et al., 2001:126) would enhance their understanding of the children’s outcomes and enable the teachers to reveal their story. A narrative approach seemed very fitting as part of a literacy project, with such a literacy function of ‘telling a story’. The case study aimed to encourage teachers to draw on their professional learning logs, highlighting a specific focus to explore and research within classroom practice, taking action and making change.

The unusual decision to involve a story teller (Michael Loader) part way through the project evolved from the need for the facilitator to maintain the teachers’ motivation, to try new methods in the classroom in the second year of the project, and to promote the purpose of telling their story of research to others as a positive experience. A guidance structure for the case study was developed by the facilitator and the professional story teller which makes this research unique in itself (Appendix 3 Fisk & Loader, 2016). The case study structure or story pathway/journey was developed to make the task less daunting for the teachers, and to try to ensure some commonality between them for consistency of process. It also aimed to consolidate their (new) understanding of the action research process, and enhance their belief that they could take ownership of their research and share it in the public domain.

MacNaughton and colleagues (2001:127) state that ‘for most case study researchers the main benefit of case study is that the familiar is seen afresh as a result of rigorous examination’, and Roberts-Holmes (2005:47) claims that ‘case studies need to be richly contextualised with plenty of detailed description to give the reader a good sense and feel for the institution under investigation’.

The case study method supports the autobiographical nature of the teacher research where this is combined with their ethnographic study and their influence on the target group of children within the shared culture of their classroom. Case study research is overwhelmingly autoethnographic as it places the self of the researcher firmly within the narrative of the text (Mukherji & Albon, 2010).

Limitations of Research Approach
There were several limitations to the research:

- Teachers did not initiate their own involvement meaning that reluctance and/or reservation at the start of the project was a common feature.
- There was no capacity for the facilitator to visit the participating schools to observe the changes in practice first hand.
- There was no planned time for participating teachers to visit each other’s schools, unless informal arrangements were made.
- There was a high risk that teachers would be unable to commit to the project for two years for various reasons, including maternity leave, changing year groups, changing schools, other work commitments and personal circumstances.
- There was limited direct engagement with the head teachers/school leaders by the local authority facilitator due to the lack of facilitator capacity.
- No direct engagement with the parents of the target children was undertaken by the local authority facilitator, such as a focus group or interviews, due to the lack of facilitator capacity.
- No direct engagement with the target children by the local authority facilitator took place, relying on subjective teacher observations and interpretation of progress.

Action research is a complex and time consuming approach, and whilst two years was the maximum capacity for the facilitator there is no guarantee that the learning the teachers made about themselves as researchers will be carried forward in their future teaching.

Quantity of evidence produces its own challenges in interpretation and summarisation, and inevitably means that much evidence is not used, so author bias is possible.

Research Ethics

The teachers were made aware of the purpose of the study and why they had been asked to take part in it at the first network meeting, following the general invitation which went to the head teachers. The outline of how they would be involved, through practice, showcase and case study and the expectations around attendance and participation at network meetings and gap tasks was outlined at the start. However, the project was organic, responding to the capacity of the Early Years and Childcare Team as well as the teachers themselves, so some timings and processes had to be adapted during the course of the two years.

A research ethics form was given to each school in the second year of the project with permissions for use of data and agreement to name the schools and teachers in the project so that they could take ownership of their case studies and data in the public domain. All participating schools and individual teachers were happy to be acknowledged in the report and data shared.
Children would not be identified in the project report individually, only as a collective target group within the school or across the project as a whole. Data collated from the teachers and shared with the local authority included the child’s initials only, school attended, date and term of birth and whether they belonged to a vulnerable group such as being in receipt of pupil premium, learning English as an additional language, belonging to the Gypsy Roma traveller community, or having special educational needs or disabilities. The EYFS on-entry and profile data is systematically collected by the school, and usually collected by North Somerset local authority for all children, and permission was gained from the head teachers.

Parents completing the reading for enjoyment questionnaire were not asked to reveal the child’s name or their own.

During the project it became clear that some teachers were unable to complete it and the facilitator realised it may not have been made clear enough to the teachers individually that they and their school had the right to withdraw from the project at any point. Due to the nature of the invitation to the project this may have been misunderstood by some. Two teachers from the same school withdrew after the first year. Ten teachers completed the showcase and data set in the second year. Eight teachers competed a final written case study.

Summary
The Early Years Literacy Network Project used a variety of mixed research methodology to strengthen its evidence base, and whilst this has some disadvantages, it also enabled a deeper level of understanding to take place through the different perspectives bringing to the surface the ‘struggle’ of professional learning from within the project (Claxton 2012).

References

Claxton, G. (2012) Action Research Conference Organised by Plymouth University (School of Education) and Tavistock College, Tavistock, England on 12th May 2012


Cultivating pearls

The project themes linked to literature and findings

The research question emphasises the enjoyment of literacy and how, through network meetings and practical application of theory in the classroom, teachers could raise outcomes for children in speaking, reading and writing.

This section will explore nine project themes which arose from both the network meetings and from the teachers’ action research case studies. Each theme will be discussed within the context of relevant literature, linking it to the integral thinking that emerged through the journey of the project. Key quantitative findings and qualitative reflections will be shared, linked to each theme. This section demonstrates how the teachers were challenged to think about and reflect on their pedagogy and classroom practice through gap tasks and small-scale action research.

The project themes as pearls of wisdom

A metaphor for structuring the research themes is helpful. Each theme begins with the letter ‘p’ to indicate a pearl, a ‘pearl of wisdom’, a lesson learned. This represents the ‘knowing’ and clarity gained. The research process in its entirety, and the action research case study in particular, can be seen as that where each teacher was asked to ‘dive for pearls’ by finding something of meaning and value in their practice to study at a deeper level. Different themes were powerful for different teachers and all the teachers that completed the two year project have been represented here, their ‘pearls of wisdom’ shared.

Nine key themes, or pearls, emerged from the study, which fall into three broad areas as follows:

- **Children’s Starting Points**
  1) Poverty
  2) Parents
  3) Progress

- **Classroom Practice**
  4) Provision and Provocation
  5) Physical Penmanship
  6) Power of Story and Language for Play
  7) Pleasure of Reading
Empowering Professionals  8) Practitioners
9) Pedagogy

The following format will be used to present the key points for each theme to ensure continuity of structure for the reader.

- Area
- Theme
- Literature and Network Context
- Project Statistical Findings (Quantitative data)
- Teacher Case Studies and Reflections Direct Narrative Quotes (Qualitative data)
- School Impact Reports Direct Quotes (Qualitative data)
- Summary
- References

It is important to note that direct narrative or quotes have been selected from both the individual case studies and the school impact reports and presented here as rich and comprehensive qualitative findings to enhance statistical quantitative findings with deeper insight.
Poverty

Literature and Network Context
The Save the Children Read On, Get On campaign (2015) was integral to inspiring the Literacy Network Project. The campaign is committed to every child leaving primary school by 2025 being able to read well. It highlights that large numbers of children leave primary school in England being unable to read well and that this includes ‘one third of all children growing up in poverty’, stressing the ‘educational divide’ between those from disadvantaged backgrounds and others (Save the Children, 2015 :iv). It goes on to say that the impact of this on many of these children’s life chances is ‘dramatic’. Something that is dramatic means it is noticeable or striking. The campaign stresses that children’s early language skills are a ‘vital stepping stone’ to learning to read well and that poor children ‘face the greatest risk of falling behind from an early age’. (Save the Children, 2015:iv)

In addition, the Read On, Get On campaign report ‘Ready to Read’ emphasised that a child with weak language skills at the age of five is much less likely to be a strong reader at the age of eleven than a five-year-old with strong language skills’. (Save the Children, 2015: v) This statement prompted the collation of data throughout the Literacy Network Project to include children’s speaking attainment as well as their reading and writing attainment. In addition, the UCL Institute for Education study commissioned by Save the Children (2015) showed that:

- a child’s vocabulary ability at age five is strongly associated with their reading ability at age seven, even when family background is taken into account
- a child’s experience of poverty was strongly associated with their reading ability at age seven and where poverty was experienced persistently throughout the early years children were much less likely to do as well as other children in reading age at age seven independently of other factors
- children who scored above average at five and had no experience of poverty scored on average 32% higher than a child who scored below average at age five and had experienced persistent poverty
- there was very little gender variation on the effect of poverty and vocabulary scores at five on reading and comprehension skills later in childhood
(Save the Children 2015:16 & 17)

In the Children’s Commissioner report for England (2015) ‘Changing the odds in the early years’ parents identified many barriers to improving their children’s lives and moving out of poverty including access to benefits, housing and support services. Other key issues
raised which hinder children’s achievements included not having enough food for
breakfast, a lack of a decent night’s sleep, needing places to read and resources, as well
as access to preventative health care, affordable leisure services and access to quality
outdoor spaces. The report concludes that ‘We know that children are likely to suffer
disproportionate harm if they grow up poor in the early years’ (Children’s Commissioner,
2015: 8).

Whilst the majority of these social issues are not something a teacher can tackle
individually, they were encouraged to consider the following questions to prompt actions
they could take within the context of the Literacy Network Project:

- How can you make the school a place where families can read right from
  the start?
- How do you make interesting places in your environment for children to read?
- How will you promote the sharing of literacy resources?

The National Literacy Trust (2013) suggest that early intervention is the most effective
way to improve outcomes and note that the literacy gap emerges before children start
school. ‘By the age of three years, children from prosperous households have heard 30
million times more words than from impoverished households’ (Hart & Risley, 2003 cited
in McCoy, 2013:3). They comment on how low levels of literacy and living in poverty
create a mutually reinforcing cycle that is difficult to break, with 1 in 6 people in the UK
struggling with literacy.

The teachers were challenged to address what they could do about this and were given
these statements from National Literacy Trust Research (2016:6) to consider:

- Parental involvement in children’s reading has been found to be the most
  important determinant of language and emergent literacy
- Increased access to materials such as books can reduce the effects of living in
  poverty as children’s literacy levels are strongly influenced by the number of
  books they have in the home, irrespective of household income or parental
  expectations
- Increased access to books is also linked to reading achievement and longer
  engagement in the educational system

Andrews et al. (2017:7) noted that disadvantaged pupils in North Somerset ‘are doing
relatively worse now than they were back in 2012’. In addition, it is significant that
‘persistently disadvantaged pupils end primary school over a year behind their non-
disadvantaged peers and are over two years behind by the end of secondary school.’
(2017:10)

In 2016 in North Somerset the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and all
other pupils in the EYFS was -5.1 months. In the early years North Somerset was ranked
17th nationally with 74.5% of Reception children achieving a Good Level of Development.
In the same year, by the end of primary school in reading, writing and mathematics, North Somerset was ranked 47th nationally and for secondary this was 86th. The inference from this is that whilst there is a gap of about 5 months in development between disadvantaged and all other pupils in the early years, this gap is likely to grow as the children get older.

Poverty – Statistical Findings

Schools 2016 Census data

The census data shows the percentage of pupils claiming Free School Meals (FSM), which is an indicator of poverty levels in an area. In the study, both Walliscote Primary and Windwhistle schools were located in areas of higher deprivation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>January 2016 Census data</th>
<th>% of Pupils claiming FSM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Banwell</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Becket</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Castlebatch</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Churchill</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mead Vale</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mendip Green</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Nicholas Chantry</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walliscote</td>
<td>34.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Windwhistle</td>
<td>37.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worle Village</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wraxall</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Children’s data - Early Years Pupil Premium / Eligible for Free School Meals (FSM)

Children that are eligible for Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP) include those eligible for Free School Meals due to low income, Service Children, Children in Care, and those that are adopted from care, special guardianship and residence orders. The pupil premium is additional funding given to state-funded schools in England to raise the attainment of disadvantaged pupils of all abilities and to close the gaps between them and their peers. In 2016-2017 the additional funding was £1,320 for a primary school per child in this category (DfE).

Children who were eligible for school Pupil Premium/Free School Meals were a significant subgroup of the target groups. Some of these children were known to have already received EYPP funding whilst in early years childcare prior to starting school, whilst for others, this eligibility became known during the year. This would suggest, that whilst teachers did not always know at the start of the year which children were eligible for free
school meals, the children were none-the-less below age related expectations on entry to school.

In 2015-2016 17% of all the target children were in receipt of pupil premium (17 children) and in 2016-2017 this was 19% (15 children)

Where schools in the project knew that children were eligible for Pupil Premium/Free School Meals either when they started school or soon after, they knew that these children were more vulnerable to lower outcomes according to the national research for disadvantaged children. The Good Level of Development (GLD) results for this group are shown below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of FSM/PP reaching GLD</th>
<th>GLD achieved</th>
<th>GLD not achieved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2015/16</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016/17</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Boys and Pupil Premium**

In North Somerset 76% of boys with pupil premium reached expected levels of attainment in the EYFS profile for speaking, 54% for reading and 46% for writing (2016-2017).

Whilst in the local authority only 4% of pupil premium boys exceeded the expected level in speaking, exceptionally, two schools in the study had greater percentages of these boys reaching the exceeding level in speaking, namely, Banwell Primary school (33%) and Windwhistle Primary school (10%). These are encouraging results.

There were 23 boys with pupil premium in total over the two years of the project and of these 15 made rapid or better progress in speaking, 15 in reading and 10 in writing. This is a success of the project in that over half of the pupil premium boys made significant progress in speaking and reading.

**Poverty – Teacher Case Study Reflections**

> ‘After reading this research [National Literacy Trust, 2016], I decided that my target children for this year would include mostly boys and some of those who were eligible for free school meals. I felt compelled to do all I could to change these statistics and endeavour to build firm foundations in literacy for my children.’

Walliscote Primary
Children’s Starting Points | Theme 1 Poverty

‘The school is located in an extreme area of social deprivation...The cycle my children are facing suggests; extreme poverty, low reading levels, low attainment. I felt that my role of impact lay significantly in aiding its end through attempting to break this chain through tackling low levels of reading; but how could this be done?’

Windwhistle Primary

Poverty – School Impact Report Insights

Head teacher: ‘Children starting this school have many issues and speech, language and communication skills are key to their future development. The school struggles with writing as children have such limited experiences, they find it hard to write about what they know – particularly pleased with impact of first year of project on writing.’

Walliscote Primary

Teacher: ‘The first year of the project has contributed to a major increase in children achieving higher levels of development.’

Windwhistle Primary

Poverty - Summary

In their study of how schools were successfully supporting the attainment of disadvantaged pupils, MacLeod and colleagues (2015) identified seven building blocks for success. The literacy network has encouraged teachers to think about some of these, namely:

- Promoting an ethos of attainment for all pupils
- Having an individualised approach to addressing barriers to learning
- Focusing on high quality teaching first rather than bolt-on strategies
- Focusing on outcomes for individual pupils
- Making decisions based on data and responding to evidence used frequently.
  (MacLeod et al., 2015:10)

Numerous studies and research reports have shown clear links between children’s economic disadvantage and the risk of lower attainment in the education system and throughout life. Several teachers in this project felt compelled to try and break this cycle, especially in schools where there are greater numbers of children living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods.
The impact of the project on the progress and educational outcomes at the end of the first year in school has been highly effective for disadvantaged children eligible for Free School Meals.

References


North Somerset EYFSP Data (2017) North Somerset Council EYFSP Summary


Parents

Literature and Network Context

“Parents are children’s first and most enduring educators. When parents and practitioners work together in early years settings, the results have a positive impact on children’s development and learning.” (EYFS 2007 Department for Children, Schools and Families)

The National Assessment Agency (2008) state that a key finding from the Effective Provision of Preschool Education (EPPE) project (1997-2003) was that good outcomes for children are linked to early years settings where there is strong parental involvement, where educational aims are shared with parents, formative feedback is provided to children and the child’s progress is regularly discussed with parents.

The emphasis in the project of getting to know the parents and children well has been key in encouraging teachers to think again about how they can engage parents and wider families in the learning taking place in school, building links between home and school.

Teachers were given a gap-task of finding out, in their own way, whether parents enjoyed and valued reading themselves for pleasure and then to find ways to promote the engagement of parents in their child’s literacy acquisition.

The teachers chose different methods of engagement and building parental confidence, for example:

- Workshops for parents around writing and talk and not just phonics and the mechanics of learning to read
- The supportive promotion of home reading for parents with low literacy skills where the teacher’s expectation was that they do share books every day with their child but the text level of the book or recording this is not the main focus, so parents can focus on discussing the pictures, making up a story and enjoying time with their child
- Sharing nursery rhymes with parents and children as well as book resources
- Raising the profile with parents of the importance of talking with and asking questions of their child through classroom displays
- Encouraging parents and grandparents to come into class to share books, interests, news and discussion
- Providing opportunities for parents to share with teachers their child’s new learning
It was clear for some schools that where they were located in areas of poverty it was
harder to engage families at times, often due to parental confidence with literacy
themselves, but conversely where there were working parents in more affluent areas,
parents were often so busy they did not engage with their children’s learning as much as
they wished. The focus on parental engagement generated a lot of discussion in the
network, as it was an area that teachers felt they could directly influence through
innovative and creative ways of encouraging parents to share their child’s learning and
teachers felt empowered to boost parental confidence.

Parents – Project Statistical Findings

*English as an Additional Language/British Minority Ethnic*
This group of children were also a significant sub group with 9% in 2015-2016 and 11% in
2016-2017 of the children selected belonging to an ethnic minority group and/or not
speaking English as their first language. This could have a significant impact on their
speaking, reading and writing outcomes which have to be assessed in English in the Early
Years Foundation Stage Profile, unlike others aspects of the profile which can be assessed
in a child’s home language.

*Parent Questionnaire*
In 2016-2017 parents of the target children were asked to complete a questionnaire
(Appendix 4). There were 46 respondents from a group of 80, which is over 50%.

- 87% of parents thought it is was very important that their child could read and
  write
- 43% stated that their child enjoys reading and/or sharing stories enormously
- 30% stated that they enjoyed reading themselves
- 78% stated that since their child had started school they read/shared stories more
  frequently, with 57% saying this was daily

Of the children that had books shared with them at home it was significant that 96% of
them did so with mothers and only 65% with fathers. This may be due to family makeup,
working patterns, or interest and parental confidence. 35% of children had grandparents
reading with them, and 54% had siblings. Whilst most of the cohort were boys, mothers,
grandmothers and sisters were more likely to read with them than fathers, grandfathers
and brothers. This means that both at home and in school the majority of reading role
models were female during the project.
Parents – Teacher Case Study Reflections

‘by giving children speaking and listening games to play at home we were able to demonstrate the importance we placed as a school on speaking and listening activities and raise their profile by identifying this as ‘homework’ that needed to be completed at home...’

Parents evenings: ‘...we took this opportunity to ask the parents to share what they did with their children to read for enjoyment and what their favourite nursery rhymes were – again highlighting to the parents the importance that school places on children being able to share and recite rhymes’ ....and shared e-book free library information with parents’

‘This positive development in the communication skills and understanding of vocabulary of the children could not be developed in isolation, however. It was crucial to the success of the project that we were also able to include parents as well.’

Banwell Primary

‘I have learnt that we are very lucky that the majority of the parents take an interest in their child’s literacy skills, not all schools get such support. I have been disheartened to learn that many of these parents are finding child rearing and work difficult to balance, this I know is a far wider issue that reflects priorities of society today and something I too experience.’

Churchill Primary

‘During the first week of term, I gave out questionnaires to parents to find out what they thought about reading for enjoyment....I also asked them if they would be interested in a weekly book swap where they could swap their novels or other books.....and if they would like to take part in an afternoon reading session with their child in the classroom...I also read an article... that really struck a chord emotionally. It stated that ‘some parents reported that it was the first time anyone had ever given them positive feedback on their parenting competencies and capacities...’ Centre for Research in Early Childhood (2016:7). I think that parents should be praised on their achievements towards their child’s education and development too, and during my parent consultations I was pleasantly surprised to find that my positive feedback resulted in building on their self- esteem. It also helped to strengthen home and school relationships.’

Walliscote Primary
‘With a particularly pro-active group of parents and grandparents coming right alongside the children, our exploration into all things space begun... the engagement of all the children, but in particular, the summer born boys was significant and listening to them organising their thoughts to communicate with their peers was inspiring...'At this point I do feel that I need to acknowledge that being able to ask such involvement of parents in their child’s learning maybe relatively unique to my setting and cohort of children, as this may not always be the case.’

Wraxall Primary

Parents – School Impact Report Insight

Teacher: Successful parent group around enjoyment of writing, resulting in better home learning support due to increased parental understanding of child development.

Becket Primary

Parents – Summary

The Early Years Literacy Network Project provided an opportunity for teachers to refocus their efforts in engaging parents to become more involved with their child’s literacy development. It is significant that the parents reported sharing books more frequently with their child once they had started school, especially in the light of much early brain development taking place before the age of three years and therefore before school starting age. It is perhaps possible to then infer that if the parents had engaged even more with their child even earlier with literacy development, the child may not have been starting school below age related expectations.

References


National Assessment Agency (Dec 2008) *Engaging Parents and Children in EYFS profile Assessment* Early Years Foundation Stage

Progress

Literature and Network Context

What is the point of need?
The ‘point of need’ (Stopforth, 2016) can be seen as the wider context of a child’s starting point at a given time in their lives. This includes the access to opportunity for learning at home as well as their knowledge from previous experiences. A key element of teaching and ensuring progression in learning is to first understand a child’s starting points, their experience and knowledge. This enables teachers to build on prior learning and identify a child’s next steps for progression.

In the Early Years Literacy Network Project teachers recorded the children’s ‘on-entry’ starting points within the EYFS, and target children were selected from those starting points in speaking, reading and writing only. Whilst other elements such as understanding and listening and attention contribute to language and literacy skills, the focus for the project was narrowed to just these three aspects of the EYFS.

Through network discussions the teachers realised that they did not know enough about a child’s previous experiences including childcare opportunities and the home learning environment and endeavoured to use parent’s evenings and learning opportunities to find out more. (See Theme 2 - Parents)

Tension between identifying the point of need and perceived expectations
During the project it became clear that there was tension for the teachers in the EYFS between allowing children time to settle into their physical and social school environment, learning at their own pace, and that of an expected rate of learning and EYFS programme coverage. At the start of the project the teachers discussed a sense of moving ‘too fast too soon’ with an over-planned week and a disproportionate level of adult-led learning activities rather than giving children and teachers time to build relationships, talk, play and learn together.

In 2017 the Early Excellence report ‘A Hundred Review’ found that ‘there is an over emphasis and anxiety about what type of activity children are engaged with rather than evaluation of its effectiveness in supporting good outcomes.’ (Early Excellence, 2017:13)

The Literacy Network Project stressed the importance of teachers spending time to listen to the children talking, to gain a sense of their vocabulary development and early communication skills, as well as knowledge of their previous literacy and language experiences. It is evident in some of the case studies that teachers felt the need to focus
on children’s speaking skills or physical skills as precursors to reading and writing as this was the identified point of need, from which progress could then be made.

A key element which emerged from the project is that the teachers felt they had been given permission, through the network process and recommended reading, to spend time talking with and playing with the children, understanding their interests and using this to develop learning opportunities. This then influenced progression.

The children selected by the teachers for the research project were achieving below age-related expectations on arrival at school. They were recognised as being in need of ‘something extra’ in order for them to be able to reach age-related expectations at the end of the project.

The project encouraged teachers to implement early interventions from the start of the school year, whether as systematic intervention through opportunity for all children, or a specific planned intervention for a group of children with particular identified needs.

In a study by the University of Bristol (2016) into language and literacy development and the gender gap it shows that

‘children who did not achieve the expected standard of early language and communication at five were found to be over four times more likely to have below Level 4 Reading at age 11 (national expectation) than those who did not... It is significant to note that ‘more boys than girls start school with below-expected language skills and lower levels of attention’. (Moss & Washbrook, 2016 cited in Save the Children, 2016:v)

As shown clearly throughout the data, there were many more boys in the Early Years Literacy Network project target group, starting school at below the age-expected level of development.

In the Hundred Review the Early Excellence Centre (2017) point out that children entering the Reception Year (YR) ‘with a low starting point in their learning and development, and those that have a summer birth date, can often find it challenging to attain a Good Level of Development (GLD) by the end of YR, even when there is specific and targeted support in place.’ (Early Excellence, 2017:06). They advocate that both attainment and ‘relative achievement’ should be recognised together when measuring progress and accountability.

‘For children entering Reception with starting points below age-related expectations, the key areas of concern were often the Prime Areas of Learning and Development.’ (Early Excellence, 2017:07).

It is essential therefore that the findings show not only the children’s starting points where they are working below age-related expectations within the EYFS and the
outcomes they attained at the end of the EYFS, but also the progress that they made, whether they reached age related expectations at the end of the year or not.

Progress – Statistical Findings

Starting Points by Gender
The majority of children selected to be in the target groups by participating schools were boys in both 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 cohorts (80% and 79% respectively). This would suggest that more boys than girls were below age-related expectations on entry to school in schools across North Somerset.

Term of Birth
Children born in the autumn months (Sept-Dec) are the eldest children in the cohort and were not as represented in the target groups as those born in the spring months (Jan-Apr) or summer months (May-Aug). This is likely to be due to the older children having had more life experience than the younger children and therefore more opportunity to develop skills in speaking, reading and writing prior to school entry. Those born in the autumn can be chronologically almost a year older than the summer-born children in a class, which makes a significant difference in terms of child development. Those born in the summer terms were the most represented birth group in 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 respectively (45% and 44%).

Data demonstrates that of these summer born children, boys were significantly more highly represented in the target group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Autumn</th>
<th>Spring</th>
<th>Summer</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Starting Points: On-entry data for Speaking, Reading and Writing
The on-entry starting point tables below show that in both the first and second year of the project the children, whilst all had a chronological age of 48 months old or older (4 years +), very few were working within the 40-60 month developmental band which
would be the expected age related band on arrival at school. The majority were only just working within the developmental band below at 30-50 months and were not yet secure at this stage. This data was reflected across all three aspects, speaking, reading and writing.

The data shows that the majority of children were achieving one developmental age band below their expected level on-entry to school for their age. The North Somerset expectation on arrival at school is that children are ‘working within’ or ‘secure’ in their
‘best fit’ band of 40-60 months. The majority of children in the study were working within 30-50 months age band for speaking, reading and writing at the start of school. This could be said to be two ‘sub-levels’ below age related. For example, where they should have been ‘working within’ 40-60 months, they were ‘working within’ 30-50 months, and not yet even ‘secure’ in 30-50 months. (See Appendix 2).

In 2016-2017 in speaking alone, for example, 87% of children were in 30-50 age band in total and in 2015-2016 this was 74%.

In addition, there were also some children in the target group who were below the 30-50 month age band, showing even more significant delay in their speaking, reading and writing early skills. They were mostly at the 22-36 month level of development.

In both years, it was in reading and writing where there were the highest numbers of children showing below age related development on arrival at school. In speaking, a precursor to reading and writing, the numbers were low in the target group for children who met on-entry age related expectations, at only 13% and 8% for 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 retrospectively. This on-entry data demonstrates that the participating schools selected the target group well, aiming to focus on children below age related expectations in all three areas of literacy development. The conclusion can be drawn from these starting points that the target group selection reflects with great accuracy those for whom the project was intended for.

**Progress made by target children**

By using the EYFS development matters age related bands as a starting point for all the children in the study, and then using the North Somerset progress measures where each band has two sub categories, ‘working within’ or ‘secure’, we have been able to measure the children’s progress using the same method across the schools in the project. A step or one level of progress would be from one sub category to another, for example, from working within 30-50 months, to secure within 30-50 months. The progress measures are outlined in Appendix 2 and calculated using each child’s starting point.

Using this progress measure, children are said to have made typical or steady progress if they have made 3 points of progress (moved 3 sub-categories) in a year from their starting points at the beginning of Reception to their final assessment against the EYFSP at the end of the Reception year.

The findings show that the Literacy Network Project has had very significant positive impact on the children’s progress.

Whilst this may not be the only influence on progress and it is not known what progress the children may have made without the project, based on previous school data, the impact of the project can be said to have been a major influencing factor.
In 2015-2016 the headline progress findings are as follows:

- **Speaking** 69% made rapid or more than rapid progress with 90% making typical or more progress
- **Reading** 61% made rapid or more than rapid progress with 91% making typical progress or more
- **Writing** 47% made rapid or more than rapid progress with 88% making typical or more progress

In 2016-2017 the headline progress findings are as follows:

- **Speaking** 61% made rapid or more than rapid progress, with 95% making typical or more progress
- **Reading** 57% made rapid or more than rapid progress, with 81% making typical or more progress
- **Writing** 47% made rapid or more than rapid progress, with 83% making typical or more progress
Writing is the area where progress has been least rapid across the two years, and teachers in the study identify the following reasons in their case studies for this:

- A young cohort of summer born children who lack the physical skills for writing
- A cohort of boys who lack the fine motor skills and interest for writing

Nationally, writing achievement in the EYFS is lower than in reading or speaking, which suggest that there may be a discrepancy between the national expectations and the capabilities of young children and alludes to national teaching methods that may not yet be the best way for young children to learn to write.

The progress of summer born boys was a particular focus for several of the schools in the project. It is very significant that of the 65 summer born boys in the two year project, 65% made rapid or better progress in speaking, with 63% in reading and 43% in writing. This is a significant proportion making accelerated progress in all three aspects of literacy development.

Progress – Outcomes: Key end of year project findings

Having looked at the children’s progress and achievement, it is important to now explore their attainment and outcomes in the EYFS in order to evaluate the success of the Early Years Literacy Network Project.

Attainment: Early Learning Goals for Speaking, Reading and Writing
None of the 180 children in the target groups over the two years were expected to reach a GLD if they made typical or steady progress from their starting points on entry, as they came to school below the expected level for children their age. This meant that they
would have to make rapid or more than rapid progress in order to gain nationally expected outcomes, namely reaching the Early Learning Goal (ELG) for speaking, reading and writing.

Table showing numbers of children reaching the ELG for speaking, reading and writing:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Speaking ELG Achieved</th>
<th>Reading ELG Achieved</th>
<th>Writing ELG Achieved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2015/16 Out of 100 ch</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016/17 Out of 80 ch</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Total % Out of 180 ch</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Attainment: Good Level of Development**

In addition, in order to attain a GLD the children would need to achieve the expected ELGs for the three Prime Areas (Communication and Language, Personal, Social and Emotional Development, and Physical Development, and the Specific Areas of Literacy and Mathematics, within the EYFS.

**Percentage of children achieving Good Level of Development:**

The schools in the Early Years Literacy Network Project have shown in several ways that they have outperformed many others in the local authority in 2017. It is interesting to report on the whole cohort data for the participating schools and not just the target children as the implication is that whilst the target children benefited from the Early Years Literacy Network project, so too did the whole cohort. In particular in relation to boys we can compare some county data with schools in the project.
In North Somerset 67.7% of boys achieved the expected level at the end of Reception in the 2016-2017 cohort of children, but in 70% of the schools in the project a higher percentage of boys achieved the expected GLD.

For reading, where, in the local authority, 60% of boys achieved the expected ELG, but 80% of the project schools achieved a higher percentage than this. In the local authority for writing, 64.4% of boys achieved expected, and in the project group 40% of participating schools achieved a higher percentage of boys reaching this milestone (North Somerset Council EYFSP, 2017).

Progress – Teacher Case Studies and Reflective Findings

‘We noticed that the children’s progress in communication and language was accelerated, especially in speaking, as children had something important to say and were motivated to get their ideas across, to both their peers and adults. The [bike wash] project seemed to especially inspire the group of boys who initially came up with the idea through their real life problem [of having muddy bikes] and we saw an increase in the number of collaborative discussions and conversations taking place, both in play and adult facilitated discussions.’

Becket [Authors words in brackets]

‘...although the data for our target children may look a little disappointing on the surface, it does not show the true impact of the project and each individual child’s progress. The data does not show the smiling faces of the children as they choose to mark-make. It does not show the attitudes of the children who see themselves as writers as they go into Year 1. It does not show the improvement in physical strength as the children can all use the ultimate pencil grip.

Above all, it does not show the enthusiasm of the children and their sheer love of writing as they move forward in their school careers.’

Castlebatch

Progress – School Impact Report Findings – Quotes

Year 1 Teacher: Seen remarkable difference in the cohorts, both in reading and writing, coming into Year 1 with more solid embedded phonics knowledge and maintained throughout Year 1 reaching and beyond age related (expectations)

Literacy Coordinator: Less children needing phonics interventions ...impact on reading clear to see.
**Head teacher:** Impact of project been clear to see, with year on year progress in GLD – extremely pleasing. The Early Years team worked incredibly hard to embed outstanding practice in the EYFS and children making fantastic progress.

Banwell

**Teacher:** The project was a huge success and had extremely positive impact...children are keen, enthusiastic and confident to read and write.

**Head teacher:** Enabled us to create the conditions for faster progress than previously – in writing in particular, now borne out in higher levels of attainment for large numbers of children.

**Governor:** Higher numbers of children being able to read and write.

St Nicholas Chantry

**Teacher:** Boys in particular made great progress due to more tailored opportunities to develop speaking, reading and writing.

**Teaching assistant:** Interesting to see the positive impact on speaking, reading and writing in the cohort.

**Literacy Coordinator:** Rise in progress for writing strand looks very positive.

Walliscote

**Teacher:** The first year of the project contributed to a major increase in children achieving higher levels of development.

**Year1 Teacher:** Clear improvement for speaking, reading and writing.

Windwhistle

**Governor:** I have been very encouraged by the positive impact the project has had on the thinking, teaching and learning and therefore outcomes for children.

Wraxall

### Progress – Summary
Teachers are accountable not just for a child’s attainment but for the progress made, meaning that both are important measures of how far a child has come within the school year. Supporting parents to understand and engage in this process of progression is key.

This theme has highlighted the need for teachers to understand how robust assessment in the early years, through observation, sharing of information and attention to children’s interests and experiences can illuminate the child’s starting points on entry to school. This, in turn, leads to pinpointing the ‘point of need’ (Stopforth, 2016) that a child may have, for example, any gaps in developmental skills or knowledge. From there, the teacher can facilitate progression and next steps. Specific interventions may be needed to do this with a target focus and intended outcome. In this project, case studies show that teachers often needed to target their intervention focus on children talking first, in order to facilitate the experiences for reading and writing. This reflects the premise that ‘reading and writing float on a sea of talk’ Britton (1970).

References


Provision

Literature and Network Context

Hackett (2014:5) states that ‘literacy is not a fixed sets of skills, but a social practice which depends on context’ and cites Leander & Sheehy (2004) who ‘urge researchers and educators to pay more attention to the relationship between place and literacy’, arguing ‘when we use words, we are always situating ourselves’ (Leander & Sheehy, 2004:3).

The provision referred to in this context is that which is on offer for the children in their ‘place’, both indoors and outdoors, where they can explore recent and new learning opportunities, choose what to play with and practice skills. Teachers were encouraged to think again how their ‘continuous’ provision might be supporting challenge for the children in the domain of language and literacy. It was not advocated that provision was a random set of opportunities, but those that supported children to link their school and life learning experiences, to build on their starting points and interests in order to enable the children to develop their ‘characteristics of effective learning’.

The Characteristics of Effective learning are outlined by Stewart (2011:12) as follows:

- playing and exploring – children engaged as agents in their learning
- active learning – children motivated to learn
- creating and thinking critically – children thinking about their learning

In order for children to access learning in this way, and develop these dispositions for learning, they must have some control over the direction of their learning, and rich hands-on experiences to engage with.

Isaacs (1932) promoted the idea of children discovering the ‘world without’ (outside of them). The teachers were encouraged to use, for example, collections, experiences, real people, places and objects for the children to engage with, to develop their interests and fascinations through this classroom provision. These enhancements to provision in the ‘world without’ could be seen as ‘provocation’ to stimulate children’s desire to explore. Provocation includes natural and man-made resources and helps children gain a sense of their place in the world around them.

In speaking at a conference on Language, Literacy and Meaning-Making, Giacopini’s (2015) view is that:

‘we need to legitimize children’s possibilities by giving them experiences to develop their processes and competencies (informal learning) which does in fact prepare children for more formal learning later...(we need to give them) a structure of
Enabling children to discover and find their own meaning in their ‘world without’ (Isaacs, 1932) supports both their informal and formal learning, their characteristics of learning and approaches to learning.

Children are interested in actual things and events in their discovery of the ‘world without’ and where there are high levels of engagement there are often high levels of attainment. Rich resources are needed to provoke children’s interest, that are diverse and different, helping the children to be creative thinkers so they can later develop into creative writers. In their book ‘What Matters to Children’, Rich et al. (2008) identified children as learners that:

- Learn all the time
- Choose
- Need a generous environment
- Learn everywhere
- Love learning
- Make meaning
- Represent their learning
- Make stories
- Take time
- Voice their learning

The teachers were invited to use this list as an audit of their practice and provision, including selecting one of the above to discuss in detail with the children in the class. They were then encouraged to link this to writing provision, making changes that had come from their teacher-child discussions.

Children often become absorbed in place. They have a natural tendency to explore environments and use them to pursue their interests and desires. Early Excellence (2017) highlight that there is often a ‘top down pressure’ on Reception teachers that ‘attempts to move practice towards a more formal approach with a greater focus on Literacy and Mathematics’ (Early Excellence, 2017:10). This was true for the teachers in the Early Years Literacy Network Project where they reported that they felt an inherent challenge in getting the balance right between child-led learning and teacher-led learning. It was clear within the network that teachers often felt they didn’t have time, or permission to take the time, to follow through from children’s questions and to let the children lead the learning.

This, in turn, created conflict for teachers between providing the sorts of classroom environments that are more formal and ones that are more attuned to children’s natural stage of development and exploration. Early Excellence also report in their Hundred
Review that ‘there is evidence of a misunderstanding of YR practice and provision, and a lack of awareness that a counter-intuitive approach to Literacy and Mathematics teaching is more likely to secure good outcomes. (Early Excellence, 2017:10)

Provision: Teacher Case Study Findings and Reflections

**Boys and intrinsic motivation to write**

‘In our provision I knew I wanted to ensure ...

- Boys were physically able and ready to write
- Boys had something to write, based on their own ideas, thoughts and feelings
- Their need to communicate those ideas, thoughts and feelings were so strong that it provided an intrinsic motivation to communicate through mark making

**In discussing taking the REAL (Rigorous Engaging Authentic Learning) approach**

‘The main principles behind the approach demand an authentic, real-life context for learning, coupled with an authentic, meaningful audience, all inspired by children’s curiosity and desire to solve real-life problems that affect them.’

‘it was clear that they understood and responded positively to the real life problem we were trying to solve and were determined in their purpose’ (Developing a bike wash)

‘the key to engaging boys to raise attainment and develop positive attitudes’ ... ‘is developing an environment that enables children to take a lead in their learning.’

**Summarised as:** Providing ‘adults that listen’ to children, ‘first hand real life experiences’ including real problems to solve, ‘giving children ownership’ and ‘giving children time to reflect on their experiences’ particularly through the use of photographs and technology.

Becket

‘Whilst many of the children keenly accessed the provision, we found that most of our target children, i.e. our summer-born boys, were not captured by our provocations and kept disappearing to play with sticks in the bushes... As our summer-born boys were so keen to play with sticks, we duly covered these sticks with foil and let their imaginations take over. They became light sabres, wizard wands and batons and the boys were keen to practice their letter formation at the beginning of each session.’

Castlebatch
‘The literacy provisions in all areas of our unit have improved due to the reading and writing audits carried out as gap tasks. These changes, some as simple as including magazines from the children’s favourite TV programmes in the book corner...have inspired the children to want to read and mark-make and write.’

‘I revisited and changed pedagogy, processes and provision. The changes we have made to our timetable and our provision because of the project has meant that the enthusiasm for literacy in our unit is more evident than in previous years, not just for the children, but for our staff too.’

St Nicholas Chantry

‘The question posed by an eager four year old of “Can I choose my learning now?” after a child had completed a number of adult-led jobs left me feeling unsure as to how best our provision was supporting our children’s needs. Their opportunity to explore their own learning and to engage in talk and play with peers and practitioners was not readily available amongst the structured routines. I was not alone with this concern.’

‘We changed the focus of the day away from adult-directed activities to the provision of higher quality provocation activities for the children to access independently...this instantly had a positive impact on the children’s opportunity for choice and engagement in higher quality talk and play with their peers...the children continued to explore the provocation ...however instead of feeling it was a ‘job’ I began to use I wonder questions...the children loved the concept of a challenge alongside the opportunity to talk...’

Windwhistle

Provision: School Impact Report Findings – Quotes

**Teaching assistant:** Positive impact on boys enthusiasm to write through popular culture related activities in provision

**Governor:** Shines positive light on using children’s much loved characters from popular culture into school environment enhancing enjoyment of learning and creativity in writing...more fun outdoor learning opportunities which are less formal...building writing into play so children associate writing as fun.

Castlebatch
**Classroom Practice | Theme 4 Provision**

*Teaching assistant:* Increased writing opportunities outside.

*Head teacher:* Changes to learning environment, especially book area in centre of room had positive impact on children’s engagement with books... Both boys and girls independently choosing writing activities.

Churchill

*Teacher:* Enabled school to really think about, and audit, learning environment to provide for language and literacy skills.

*Teaching assistant:* Changes made to provision and timetable made enthusiasm for Literacy more evident than in previous years.

St Nicholas

*Literacy Coordinator:* Witnessed her provision change as she has developed her thinking

Wraxall

**Provision: Summary**

‘Literacy and play go hand in hand for many young children’ (Christie, 1991, cited in Nutbrown, 2011:95). Getting the balance right for learning literacy through play provision and learning literacy through formal teaching of phonics, reading and writing has been one of the greatest dilemmas for the teachers in the Literacy Network Project. Teachers were challenged to review the role of play and enjoyment in the teaching and learning of speaking, reading and writing. In addition, they were asked to audit their environment (place and provocations) so that children could discover their ‘world without’ (Isaacs 1932). As children discover the world outside of them, they are motivated to represent and record, for example, through talk, drawing and writing. This underpins the skills needed and dispositions required as schooling becomes more formal.

**References**

Early Excellence Centre for Inspirational Learning (2017). *Teaching Four and Five Year Olds: The Hundred Review of the Reception Year in England*. Available at earlyexcellence.com/hundredreview

Hackett, A. (2014). *Movement and Emerging Literacy* article in Early Education Journal: *Emergent Literacy;* University of Sheffield , Autumn 2014 Number 74 Early Education The
*Spatializing literacy research and practice* New York: Peter Lang Publishing


Physical Penmanship

Literature and Network Context

The Collins Dictionary (2017) refers to physicality as ‘the state of being physical’ and when relating this to the way that people work it describes the ‘energy and enthusiasm’ that is obvious in their work and the way that they produce work.

Action for Children conducted small scale research with Loughborough University in 2015-2016 and found that children’s physical development has declined by 18 percentile points since 2001, including manual dexterity, balance, throwing and catching. They also found that a programme of intervention increased these skills in children.

Significantly, several schools in the project chose the development of physical skills prior to writing as the focus area for action research having identified the ‘point of need’ (Stopforth 2016) on entry to school as under developed fine and gross motor skills. Their challenge was to develop a child’s physicality, physical skills and readiness for being taught to write, in other words, their physical penmanship.

Children relate to their bodies in a very natural way, learning to explore their world through their senses, including the sense of movement. Children learn to tune into their senses, which filter the world around them, helping them to process it, and to know and understand their own bodies. Isaacs (1932) identified some key ways that children learn through:

- The love of movement and perfecting bodily skills
- The interest in actual things and events, the discovery of the world without
- The delight in make-believe, the expression of the world within

The teachers were asked to consider how they might support children’s literacy learning experiences through using their senses (touch, sight, hearing, taste, smell) as well as movement (proprioceptive and vestibular) which can help story and writing to come alive for children. Linked to story-telling this can help children to process the narrative and link the story to real life sensory experiences, which in turn builds brain memory. By providing these opportunities teachers can hook into children’s natural instincts in order to engage them not only in language development, developing narratives through story experiences, but also in applying this to writing.

To understand the love of movement and bodily skills (Isaacs 1932) the physicality of writing was explored using gross and fine motor skills. Teachers were asked to consider classroom opportunities for developing a child’s core stability, balance, body pivots,
hand-eye coordination and the cross-lateral reflex. Teachers were also asked to think about how the senses filter our world and help us to know our own bodies and that by increasing children’s tactile and sensory experiences in the context of mark-making and writing, through class indoor and outdoor play provision, teachers could develop rich environments for learning early physical skills.

Pascal and Bertram (2016) advocate physical activity to enhance boys’ academic achievement in particular.

‘Young boys need plenty of physical activity and continuous opportunities to move within their environment. The outdoors, providing first-hand experience of the natural world, is a particularly stimulating context, providing the young boy with a wide range of physical, sensory and cognitive learning experiences.’ (Pascal and Bertram 2016: 19)

As in language development, when babies babble for the pleasure of hearing the sounds first, before learning that through interaction the spoken word carries meaning, in symbolic representation, children’s marks or ‘scribbles’ are initially a delight in pure physicality prior to starting to control marks with more dexterity, then learning that marks can communicate meaning. (Department for Children, Schools and Families 2008)

Children learn that symbolic representation (writing, drawing) communicates meaning from their inner world such as thoughts and feelings and ideas. Kress (1997) calls this multi-modal learning, where children combine what they are doing with what they are feeling and thinking.

A study by the University of Bristol (Moss & Washbrook, 2016) found that the gender gap is contributed to and reinforced by the following:

• Home environments and pre-school settings give boys and girls different levels of encouragement and resources to engage in a range of pre-literacy and literacy practices, including through play

• Social expectations about gender appropriate identities, behaviours and norms lead fewer boys than girls to actively think of themselves as readers and writers (Moss & Washbrook, 2016, cited by Save the Children, 2016:15)

It is significant that the network meeting where physicality, physical development and writing was discussed seemed to have the deepest impact on the teachers in regards to shifting their thinking about provision, partly due to the practicality and enjoyment of the multi-sensory story telling session they explored accompanied by mark-making activities, but more because it seemed as if a certain sort of freedom had been permitted in their teaching of writing. There was an air of liberation in the meeting and connection made between what teachers know about young children’s need for physicality, and their need
to get the children talking, finding meaning and motivation from within in order to meet the school’s writing expectations.

Physical Penmanship: Project Statistical Findings

Whilst the study did not specifically measure progress and outcomes for children in their physical skills it remains essential that children develop these skills in order to write. In the EYFS the Prime Areas underpin children’s Specific Areas of development. Physical development is identified as a Prime Area. One Early Learning Goal (ELG) for physical development includes the statement that children should handle equipment and tools effectively, including pencils for writing (EYFSP, 2017).

The on-entry data shows that children were particularly low in their writing skills as a starting point. In 2015-2016 100% of the target children were below age-related expectations at this point in the year, and 99% in 2016-2017. This is a startling statistic that strongly alludes to children not yet being ready to develop the necessary skills or the expectations being too high. Furthermore, it is possible that there is a dearth of experience (both at home and in early years settings, or a combination of the two) in the area of physical skill development for children prior to school entry.

However, one of the most significant outcomes of the project was that 57% of children reached the expected age related ELG for writing in 2015-2016 and 52% in 2016-2017. This means that those children had to make huge leaps of progress to develop their language skills and penmanship. In fact, the progression in writing achieved meant that in 2015-2016 not only did 30% of the children make typical progress, but 61% made either: rapid, more than rapid, or exceptional progress. In 2016-2017 36% made typical progress with 47% making rapid, more than rapid or exceptional progress.

The headline from the data is that 54% of boys made rapid or better progress in writing (2016/17) a significant improvement on the previous year (42% 2015/16) which could be attributed to the focus on writing that took place at the end of the first year of the project had greater impact on practice during the second year.

Physical Penmanship: Teacher Case Study Findings and Reflections

“We decided that ensuring boys had multiple, high quality opportunities to develop their physical skills was of paramount importance... I knew I wanted to ensure that:

- Boys were physically able and ready to write
- Boys had something to write about based on their own ideas, thoughts and feelings
The need to communicate those ideas, thoughts and feelings was so strong that it provided an intrinsic motivation to write.’

Becket

‘Could we improve the outcomes of our boys by improving our provision for physical development?’

‘We noticed that most of our children who needed to develop their shoulder, elbow and wrists pivots were choosing to go outside, so this is where we put most of our provision.’

‘We then moved on to targeting different children depending upon their physical need and assigning appropriate activities.’

‘Our summer-born boys were so keen to play with sticks...’

The data ‘does not show the improvement on physical strength as the children can all use the ultimate pencil grip...’

Castlebatch

‘The things you have reminded me of, about proprioception and pivots, has really challenged me as to whether we are challenging small children to do things they are just not ready for...and with the increased expectation of the new national curriculum I feel that we are turning more children off...I am a bit sad about the number of children I hear about who don’t like school...’

Mendip Green (from a discussion)

Physical Penmanship – School Impact Report Findings and Quotes

Teacher: Positive impact on fine manipulative skills especially for boys.

Teacher: Successful parent group around enjoyment of writing resulting in better home learning support due to increased parental understanding of child development.

Becket

Teacher: Physical skills, especially of summer-born boys, and impact on writing and willingness to engage with writing activities independently... Confidence in children’s own view of themselves as writers.
Teaching assistant: Boys really benefited from adults being specific about the link between the development of large and small muscle control and their confidence in early writing skills.

Year 1 teacher: Noticed big change in Year 1 children and attitudes to writing...Work gone into ensuring children are physically ready to write has had a huge impact on their ability... Children enjoy writing and see themselves as writers.

Literacy coordinator: Children seizing opportunities to write with enthusiasm... Really positive attitudes to writing that is building self-esteem and promoting well-being.

Head teacher: Well planned activities enabling children to build strength to write... Built resilience to see themselves as writers and to write at length... I can confidently say that I have never seen such a willing group of writers (Year 1)...I witnessed high quality writing from all children and not a reluctant writer in sight!

Governor: Fun ways of targeting muscles for writing strength...Gives children confidence to express themselves freely on paper with no boundaries.

Castlebatch

Year 1 teacher: Year 1 children resilient, independent writers prepared to have a go at longer pieces of writing.

Churchill

Teacher: Improvement in writing skills particularly noticeable, including enthusiasm, motivation, stamina and independence with writing...Children more willing to take on an adult initiated writing challenge... Children demonstrate more love of writing.

Year 1 teacher: Clear improvement in the quality of writing in Reception this year, evident through writing moderation in the school... Children’s enthusiasm and excitement to write and knowledge of how to be a successful writer is really apparent.

St Nicholas Chantry

Head teacher: School struggles with writing as children have such limited experiences, they find it hard to write about what they know.

Walliscote
Teaching assistant: Physical activities for fine motor skills had noticeable impact on children’s control when writing.

Windwhistle

Year 1 teacher: It has been interesting to watch as she has implemented new strategies and resources to encourage more high quality writing in the early years.

Wraxall

Physical Penmanship: Summary

The conflicts between the acquisition of physical skills as pre-cursors for readiness to write, the time it takes for children to develop these and the early age in which children in England start school, has highlighted a particular challenge for teachers in the early years. This is especially noticeable in regards to summer-born boys. However, in their report *The Lost Boys*, Save the Children (2016:14) are clear that ‘we cannot tell from the available data whether early gender gaps are the result of biological or social pressures.’

The majority of the children in the project target groups, behind in all areas of language development, not just writing, were boys. Some teachers chose to focus on this as an area of study and whilst there is ‘no consensus about whether it is because of differences in boys’ and girls’ biology and development timelines (biological drivers) or whether it is the result of children responding to the adults and peers around them whose behaviour is influenced by gender expectations (sociological drivers)’ (Save the Children, 2016:14) physicality, nonetheless, was seen to be significant.

The Early Years Literacy Network Project promoted the application of knowing how learners learn and applying this to writing enjoyment. Teachers were encouraged to think about their own classrooms and children’s love of movement and perfecting bodily skills, their interest in actual things in the discovery of the ‘world without’ and their delight in make believe, the discovery of the ‘world within’ (Isaacs 1932). The teachers were then asked to apply this to writing in particular.

The astonishing data from this project shows just what an impact changing the way teachers thought about their classroom provision for writing could make. They learnt about how children develop writing both physically and as a representation of their internal world, and ensured boys in particular found reasons to write with enjoyment of both their physicality and penmanship.
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Power of Story and Language for Play

Literature and Network Context

Play is fundamental to human learning as it enables the development of language, social skills, creativity and imagination. Cooper (2009:24) states that ‘oral language development through play and practice is the true gateway to early literacy’.

Gussin Paley (cited in Cooper, 2009:34) asserted that the children she taught ‘need for me to be a teacher of play first’. Children make their own meaning through play and this feeds into their language and literacy development as shown in the words of Kress (1997, cited in Hackett, 2014:4) ‘In learning to read and write, children come as thoroughly experienced makers of meaning’.

Play has been a central theme for many innovators and educators in childhood studies. For example, ‘Play is the highest expression of human development in childhood, for it alone is the free expression of what is in a child’s soul’ (Froebel cited in Arnold, 2014:15). It is only children who have access to play that can develop the courage and daring to play (Abbott 2001:18).

In recent years there has been considerable concern about the lack of play and language development in the English education system as well as in the modern world. ‘Children are losing childhood because they aren’t given the gift of time to play’ (Hurley, 2014 cited in Arnold, 2014: 30). Throughout the network project this issue was a point of much discussion, emotion and dilemma for the teachers. They repeatedly reported their struggle to meet their perceived expectations of what Ofsted, Head teachers and Year 1 teachers wanted the children to achieve educationally and allowing children the time to be children – learning and exploring at a pace which felt ‘right’ for 4 and 5 year olds. A central question for the teachers was how could they give children the ‘gift of time to play’ and still meet the educational early learning goals?

In their report on the importance and value of children’s play, Whitebread et al (2012:3) sum up the teachers’ dilemma very well;

‘While in some European countries the emphasis continues to be upon providing young children with rich, stimulating experiences within a nurturing social context, increasingly in many countries within Europe and across the world, an ‘earlier is better’ approach has been adopted, with an emphasis upon introducing young children at the earliest possible stage to the formal skills of literacy and numeracy. This is inimical to the provision and support for rich play opportunities.’
In addition to the concern about lack of time for play, there is also a national concern about the lack of language skills that children have on arrival at school. Palmer (2006) has long advocated the need for society as a whole to take the delay in language skills more seriously. In her book *Toxic Childhood*, she noted that:

‘Everywhere I went it was the same story; four and five year olds were coming to school with poorer language skills than ever before; they weren’t arriving with the repertoire of nursery rhymes and songs little ones always used to know, and children of all ages found it increasingly difficult to sit down and listen to their teacher or to express complex ideas in speech or writing’ (Palmer 2006: 105)

In the report *Speech, Language and Communication Needs and Primary School-aged Children* the I CAN charity raises awareness of the emotional and social aspects of language development and its effect on children’s self-esteem. ‘Friendships are extremely important for children in primary school. The ability to socialise with peers, negotiate disagreements and be part of a friendship group is paramount.’ (Lee, 2008:9)

The Telegraph reported in March 2015 that a new study by the Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) found that boys are ‘twice as likely as girls to start primary school unable to speak properly’ (Espinoza, 2015)

Pascal & Bertram (2016:14) draw attention to official figures showing

‘that ‘White British’ boys in low-income groups are the lowest performing ethnic group in the UK and … the effects of this class and income difference on their learning …is starkly evident on entry to primary school.’

They go on to advocate that

‘environments where sustained shared dialogues between children and adults predominate with lots of story sharing and creating, provide the optimal conditions for learning to occur.’ (Pascal and Bertram 2016:18)

The premise that reading and writing float on a sea of talk (Britton 1970) was fundamental to the Early Years Literacy Network project. The teachers were asked to ensure that talk was encouraged and celebrated in the classroom, using role-play, poetry, rhyme, song, actions, the senses, and enlivened story telling. They were encouraged to follow the children’s interests and fascinations and to capture more of the children’s talk in order to gain a greater understanding of their narratives and inner worlds.

Teachers were also asked to gain a better understanding of children’s vocabulary development and teaching strategies to support talk, such as playing vocabulary memory games, playing with new words, and using familiar and unfamiliar objects of reference. This led to the question of how were the teachers encouraging children to talk in their classrooms? Use of popular culture was promoted to encourage children to talk about
what they know, including maximising support from home with children being able to share more about their lives and familiar personal objects in which they were already interested. Rhyme, poetry and alliteration ideas were shared by the facilitator to remind teachers that these could be embedded easily into daily practice and classroom routines and were an excellent way of engaging children with language. The emphasis was on fun and enjoyment regarding language development, and the playfulness of the teacher.

Play is an expression of the ‘world within’ (Isaacs 1932). This is true for teachers and children alike. The teachers were encouraged to become playful through story reading or story telling with their class. To support this, a professional storyteller, Michael Loader, was invited to join the project not only to support teacher confidence within their own practice, but uniquely to motivate them to tell their own research ‘story’ to others, through the network sessions and a showcase at a North Somerset Early Years Conference 2017. People who share their stories will feel the uniting effect that stories have (Steixner & Heidegger, 2013)

Story- telling, and the use of narrative, features strongly in young children’s role play. Role play invites children to be what they want to be, enables variety of meaning-making, and offers rich opportunities for pretence and make-believe. Stories are a key way to share an author’s imagination and to develop children’s own imagination. ‘Good stories, be they direct or indirect, give us valuable insights into the ‘sense making’ of learning.’ (Engel 2000, cited by Lancashire County Council, 2007:6)

By using fun and playful opportunities for children to become deeply engaged in story-telling, role-play, poetry, rhyme and word games, amongst others, the teachers enabled children to develop their speaking skills first before representing that meaning in writing tasks.

**Power of Story and Language for Play: Statistical Findings**

In the 2015–2016 and the 2016–2017 target groups there were 87% and 83% of children, respectively, arriving at school below the age-related expectations of 40–60 months developmental band for speaking. Whilst this statistical data shows low language levels on arrival at school there is no statistical data for personal, social and emotional development in the study. However, as links between language and social development are strong, we can conclude that some of these children would also be at a disadvantage when involved in social play, such as role-play, due to their language delay.

The Early Learning Goal or age-related expected level at the end of the EYFS for speaking states that ‘Children express themselves effectively, showing awareness of listeners’ needs. They use past, present and future forms accurately when talking about events that have happened or are to happen in the future. They develop their own narratives and explanations by connecting ideas or events.’ (EYFSP, 2017:29)
Language skills are key to the development of narrative. The children’s progression in language skills may have been heavily influenced by a culmination of the teachers’ delivery of enjoyable playful language activities, including stories, rhymes, poetry, and word games for example, as well as increased language activities at home.

The progression charts show that 69% and 61% of children in 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 respectively made rapid or more than rapid progress, with only 10% and 3% making less than typical progress or ‘not enough’ progress in speaking. This indicates that whilst the teachers may have found it very difficult to marry up the educational requirements for very young children with their own beliefs about children’s play, they found successful ways to combine the two.

Table of progress in speaking:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2015-2016</th>
<th>End year</th>
<th>2016-2017</th>
<th>End year</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>On-entry SPEAKING</strong></td>
<td><strong>End year SPEAKING</strong></td>
<td><strong>On-entry SPEAKING</strong></td>
<td><strong>End year SPEAKING</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Below 30-50 months</td>
<td>13%</td>
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<td>Below 30-50 months</td>
<td>6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Working within 30-50 months</td>
<td>55%</td>
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<td>Working within 30-50 months</td>
<td>54%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Secure 30-50 months</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td></td>
<td>Secure 30-50 months</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working within 40-60 months</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>Working within 40-60 months</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secure 40-60 months</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>Secure 40-60 months</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working within ELG</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td></td>
<td>Working within ELG</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secure ELG</td>
<td>31%</td>
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<td>Secure ELG</td>
<td>33%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Working within ELG exceeding</td>
<td>3%</td>
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<td>Working within ELG exceeding</td>
<td>8%</td>
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<td>Secure ELG exceeding</td>
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<td>Secure ELG exceeding</td>
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<td>Moved away</td>
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82% of children in both years of the study who were below age related on-entry for speaking achieved the expected Early Learning Goal at the end of the year. Whilst it cannot be claimed that only the network project contributed to this phenomenally positive result, it nonetheless highlights the need for EYFS teachers to focus on children’s talk and play.
Power of Story and Language for Play: Teacher Case Study Findings and Reflections

'We noticed as an EYFS team that there had been a steady decline in children beginning their schooling with a good understanding of language and ability to talk and communicate effectively with others.'

'I was constantly on the look out to seize the unexpected opportunities that were there for enhancing meaning.'

'It is now almost like a game of word ping-pong that bounces across the room as the children share their thinking, and make connections between words and ideas. This positive development in the communication skills and understanding of vocabulary of the children could not be developed in isolation, however. It was crucial to the success of the project that we were also able to include parents as well.'

'My experiences made me realise that we must not miss our chance with the children in the classroom to talk, because investing time in speaking and listening...actually has a positive rather than a negative impact upon children’s future ability to read and write.'

Banwell

'Our target children preferred to play in the bushes rather than access [writing] provision ....take the writing opportunities into the bushes....set up a Super Hero writing pod under a tarpaulin shelter. The children were certainly motivated by the shelter and were thrilled when Spiderman himself made an appearance and played alongside them. Every single child was inspired and motivated to write.'

'We scaffolded purposeful writing activities through the children’s play’ using ‘themed writing pods to reflect the children’s interests’ in popular culture.

Castlebatch [author’s words in brackets]

'One thing I have noticed, having been lucky enough to teach a broad spectrum of year groups, is that children, regardless of their age, share a love of having someone read or tell them a story.’

Churchill

'There was massive conflict in values. As an early years specialist, I know how vital play is for children but in reality the paperwork, accountability and pressures from leaders meant that the balance had been tipped off the scale.’

St Nicholas Chantry
‘to my surprise ...a significant number of children were unaware of the songs, patterns or rhymes’

‘Identifying the significantly low levels of language altered our approach and enabled us to change the focus of control back to the children...the weekly discussions (with the children) altered the manner in which learning could take place...the cycle demonstrated the importance of providing children with the opportunity to take ownership of their learning ... generating pride and engagement in their ideas as they come to life.’

‘The simple process of critical reflection through dialogue also provided effective informative planning which materialised from children’s hearts.’

Windwhistle

‘...the children’s eyes turned to the stars as they created some fabulous constellations... not only did this capture the children’s imagination, as they worked to such a scale, but offered the developing writing opportunities so many of the children required... embracing the extra-terrestrial... dressing up as aliens... finding great hiding places around the school...’

‘Am I encouraging high-quality playful learning in my setting by the way that I speak? This is where I feel I need to continue with my journey, making my practice and setting a place where play and learning are absolutely the same thing... will that then truly address the age-old issue that so many early years teachers find themselves addressing... engaging their youngest boy writers?’

Wraxall

Power of Story and Language for Play: School Impact Report Findings

**Teaching assistant:** Taken more time to record children’s oral language.

**Head teacher:** Significant impact of project on children’s speech and language ability, with children entering school at below-age related expectations.

Becket

**Year 1 teacher:** Speaking and listening skills excellent and ability to talk and perform to audiences.

Churchill
**Teacher:** Ensuring there is always time to talk and read stories.

**Teaching assistant:** Children more confident to talk and share their thinking... more focus and structure to children’s play accessed independently.

St Nicholas Chantry

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**Head teacher:** Talking and discussing experiences has supported their writing very positively.

Walliscote

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**Teacher:** Enabled me to alter my approach to have language at forefront of thinking.

**Teaching assistant:** Enhancing children’s speech through scaffolding language opportunities, modelling and paraphrasing... Increased ability of children being able to speak in full sentences and using connectives in their speech... Time for quality talk being created in timetable and environment.

**Head teacher:** Increased teachers’ interest, confidence and expertise in language, vocabulary development and sharing a love of reading and writing.

Windwhistle

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**Literacy Coordinator:** Fed back ideas from network informing staff on how better to develop role play and literacy areas.

**Head teacher:** Always had issues on-entry to school with speech and language development.

Worle

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**Head teacher:** Great opportunity to develop role play, story-telling and focus on literacy development.

**Governor:** I have been very encouraged by the positive impact the project has had on thinking, teaching and learning and therefore outcomes for children.

Wraxall
Power of Story and Language for Play: Summary

Whitebread et al. (2012:3) state that:

‘Opportunities and support for children’s play, which is critical to their development of the abilities they will need as future citizens... are themselves under threat. This arises from increasing urbanisation, from increasing stress in family life, and from changes in educational systems.’

Teachers in the network struggled with the educational system and its contradictions with their belief that children should learn through play. ‘Playfulness is strongly related to cognitive development and emotional well-being’ (Whitebread et al., 2001:5). This includes learning to speak, interact with others and share their inner worlds. This cognitive dissonance was somewhat resolved through the teachers’ own learning in the network and their action research, supported by excellent progress in speaking by the children. The teachers in the network made changes to their classroom practice to extend opportunities for talk and story, often through play. In the words of Gussin Paley (1990:4) ‘amazingly, children are born knowing how to put every thought and feeling into story form... it is play... but it is also story in action, just as storytelling is play put into narrative form.’ This demonstrates the power of story and its use for language development through play.

References


Pleasure of Reading

Literature and Network Context

Learning to read is a complex process, especially with the intricacies of the English language. Enjoyment of that process must surely make it a more desirable one. The Read On, Get On campaign calls for all our communities to celebrate the enjoyment of reading stating that children who do not enjoy reading are ten times more likely to have fallen behind at school by age eleven. (Save the Children, 2014)

In order to unpick some reasons why children may not enjoy reading, it is useful to explore the writing of Cremin who, citing Mullis et al (2012) and OCED (2010), says that ‘a worrying number of young children report that they do not like reading’ and that there has been a ‘decline in both enjoyment and frequency of reading for pleasure among the young, especially boys.’ (Cremin, 2015:12). She goes on to suggest that this reading gender gap is partly due to early years and primary education having a largely female workforce which will ‘unconsciously privilege texts that are more attractive to girls’ (Cremin 2015:18).

Cremin’s (2015:19) suggestions for addressing this balance were shared with the network teachers and included:

- Connecting to boys individual interests
- Offering more choice in reading material
- Providing more male reader role models
- Ensuring stronger home school links
- Making reading more interactive and fun

The Read On, Get On campaign (2014) asserts that the UK is one of the most unfair countries in the developed world and that reading and poverty are directly linked. By the age of eleven White British boys are not reading well, with the reading gap between boys and girls in England being one of the widest in the developed world, and with boys being twice as likely to fall below even a very basic reading level (Save the Children, 2014:6). They call for action on 4 main fronts:

- To celebrate the enjoyment of reading in our communities
- Ensure all children have strong language skills before they start school
- To ensure rapid improvement rates in primary schools for reading
- To support mothers and fathers in homes (Save the Children 2014)

In the Good Childhood Report (2015), it is interesting to note that whilst 68% of children in England talked together with their family every day, less than 38% said they had fun with
their family every day and only 21% said they spent time learning with their family every day. Reading for fun outside of school ranked 8th of 15 activities in England. The following question was put to teachers in the project: how much do you know about whether children in the class read for fun and enjoyment at home? Teachers were also asked to share what this meant for them in terms of reading for enjoyment personally and reading with enjoyment professionally, although these are not mutually exclusive.

In 2015-2016 the teachers undertook a gap task to ascertain where reading for enjoyment took place in the school and home environment for children in their class, by carrying out a simple survey with families. They were then asked to make clear to families what the barriers to reading for enjoyment and pleasure were and find solutions to these in order to promote the enjoyment of reading to families.

The Save the Children report *The Lost Boys* (2016:17) discusses the gender gap in achievement in the early years, promoting ‘families having access to sufficient resources to engage young children in reading for pleasure at home’. This also applies to early years settings and extends to the quality of provision needing to have a ‘depth of learning opportunity and interaction’.

To deepen learning opportunities teachers were encouraged to develop their practice to include enlivening their story reading and story-telling, using a multi-sensory approach to stories, bringing stories to life and promoting the love of reading, through a range of books and texts, to the children and families. Linking stories and real world experiences was advocated and embedding story and narrative into each school day. The aim was to support inexperienced readers (young children) to find out what reading was good for (Meek, 1991 cited in Cremin, 2015:21).

Dombrey (2014:57) observes that ‘teaching reading well means tapping into the energetic desires of children to make sense of the world and to connect with the people in it.’ She goes on to highlight some key factors in learning to read as follows, which link to other project themes:

- Learning to read, write and talk are interdependent
- Reading is an active, creative process from the earliest stages
- A rich experience of stories and poems has a central role to play
- The experience of hearing stories has particular importance
- The texts that children experience out of school are significant
- Play provides a vitally important context for your children’s literacy learning
- Assessment of children’s experience, strengths, needs and interests is central (Dombrey 2014:59)

These factors were discussed with the teachers and they were asked to reflect on them within their own classroom practice.
Pleasure of Reading - Project Statistical Findings

**EYFSP children’s data**

Whilst the statistical EYFS data cannot show the enjoyment and pleasure that children found in reading, it can show their starting points and progress. An assumption has been made in that where children made rapid or better progress, in particular, they may well have found pleasure in reading as a motivator to do so.

The expected achievement at the end of the year for reading, the ELG, is as follows:

> ‘Children read and understand simple sentences. They use phonic knowledge to decode regular words and read them aloud accurately. They also read some common irregular words. They demonstrate understanding when talking with others about what they have read.’ (EYFSP 2017:29).

It is interesting to note that this goal does not mention enjoyment of reading or a range of texts, but rather focuses on the mechanics of reading. This demonstrates the conflict the teachers felt between the requirements of an outcome children must reach and the process of getting there including the motivation to read through enjoyable experiences.

The data shows that only 1% of target children, mostly boys, were at the expected level for reading on entry to school (40-60 months developmental band) in 2015-2016, and this was similar at 3% for 2016-2017. Statistical data shows that, despite this, 71% and 74% respectively of those below age-related expectation at the start of the year achieved the ELG for reading at the end of the year, in other words, reached the age related national expectation. This is a significantly positive result.

91% (2015-2016) and 83% (2016-2017) of children made typical or better progress in reading throughout the Reception year, showing that, whilst they did not all reach the ELG, the vast majority progressed at the rate any child would be expected to with over 50% of both cohorts making even faster progress. It can be deduced from this that children were motivated to read in order to make this progress, and found pleasure in doing so.

An exceptional outcome is reflected in the fact that 84% of boys made rapid or better progress in reading during 2016/17; a significant improvement on the previous year where 57% of boys achieved the same rate of progress (which is a positive outcome in itself!). It has to be considered whether teachers in the second year were able to ‘hit the ground running’ having reviewed their practice in the first year of the project so that children benefited from the changes right from the start.

We can conclude from this, that the teachers had a strong influence on the children’s reading development by actively addressing the following:

- the influence of a female workforce on boys reading materials
- the engagement of parents in reading for pleasure with their child
enabling children to independently access a range of quality texts in provision

It is particularly encouraging that two schools in the Early Years Literacy Network Project had exceptionally positive results for children achieving well in reading. In Banwell school reading levels were exceptionally high as 33.3% of boys exceeded the ELG for reading, more even than girls at 30.8%, whereas in North Somerset the figure were 19.5% for boys and 25.4% for girls. In addition, in North Somerset 60.0% of boys reached the ELG for reading, but 8 of the 10 schools in the project exceeded this, with Becket achieving 81.3% of boys reaching the expected level.

Parent questionnaires

The parents of the 2016-2017 cohort of children were asked by the project facilitator to complete questionnaires about reading for enjoyment. 30% of parent respondents enjoyed reading 'enormously' themselves, and 43% enjoyed reading with/sharing books with their children ‘enormously’. 22% said that their child sees an adult reading at home for pleasure or for work every day and 78% reported increasing the frequency of sharing books with their child since starting school. This implies that the schools’ efforts to help parents understand how important reading for pleasure is to making progress in reading had a direct influence on the frequency with which parents read with their child. This is likely to have contributed explicitly to the children’s progress and attainment.

Pleasure of Reading: Teacher Case Study Findings and Reflections

‘The staff reflected on why, despite an attractive and inviting ‘Book Nook’ area in the classroom the children were not using it to read or look at books.

This was a concern to both myself and the rest of the team as we all share the strong belief that the enjoyment of books at an early age is crucial in fostering a lifelong love of reading and literacy development. Questions posed by the staff included:

Are the children used to looking at books at home?
What kind of books do the children enjoy?
Who reads with them at home?
How do we ensure that the children are excited about books enough to want to independently pick one up and actually look at it?

Reading, writing, and speaking and listening are all intertwined and the sharing of books of all genres plays a fundamental role in the development of each of these areas of literacy. When the children are excited about a particular story they approach their learning with more enthusiasm and this in turn delivers better, more meaningful outcomes. It is the responsibility of the adults around them to share, discuss, act out,
enjoy and enthuse about books to help promote both positive attitudes towards, and effects on, their literacy skills and development.‘

Churchill

‘Sadly one parent thought reading was a waste of time but strongly felt that their child enjoyed reading at home.‘ .....‘we made changes in how often we changed children’s home reading books...introduced a book of the week...included independent reading as one of our early morning activities....and slowly we started to see a change in the children’s interest in reading.’

‘I had 32 out of 36 questionnaires returned and the response from parents was much more positive than the previous year. The general outcome was that parents enjoy reading and this was correlated with how often they were reading at home with their child. Although time was stated as a limitation with many (30 of the replies) saying that they would be very interested in attending a reading session at school.’

......‘ organised a whole school parent book swap every Friday....it is still going strong and is as popular as ever.’

‘ Over the coming months I continued to improve our reading environment ....story books that related to the interest of the children....story telling session (with professional story teller)...I have learnt that the more fun and appealing reading is the more enjoyment the children get from it especially the boys!‘

Walliscote

The enjoyment of reading through the Reading Reward Scheme has had a considerable impact on the children’s attitude towards reading, providing motivation and ownership of themselves as young readers.

Windwhistle

“Can we have more information books...?” ... one particular question really struck a chord with me. It came from one of our summer-born boys...he was absolutely right because our book corner contained significantly more fiction than non-fiction...I have learnt to broaden the materials on offer to include magazines and comics...

Wraxall
Pleasure of Reading: School Impact Report Findings and Quotes

**Teaching assistant:** Increased use of books in different locations... More engagement with sharing books from home

**Head teacher:** Changes to the learning environment, especially book area in centre of the room, had positive impact on children’s engagement with books.

Churchill

**Teaching assistant:** Children’s reading is the best for years!

St Nicholas Chantry

**Literacy Coordinator:** Reading reward system appears to be very successful...influential incentive through ‘karate’ reading (reward) scheme... Parents and children seem very responsive...Hopefully this will establish good habits early on and have a big impact on children’s reading abilities and enjoyment

**Head teacher:** Project work on the enjoyment of reading throughout the school has been significantly contributed with research both national and international from teacher in Literacy project...Classroom literacy rich environment that inspires children and families to enjoy reading for pleasure...She has increased the numbers of children reading at home through motivation of a ‘karate’ scheme...

Windwhistle

Pleasure of Reading: Summary

It is clear from both quantitative and qualitative data that the project contributed significantly to more children finding pleasure in reading, and children and parents engaging in reading together. It can be concluded from this that the enjoyment of reading contributed to children making significant progress in reading.

‘The term ‘reading for pleasure’ is often used interchangeably with ‘reading for enjoyment’ and can involve any kind of text...it can take place anywhere...at the core of reading for pleasure is the reader’s volition, their agency and desire to read, their anticipation of the satisfaction gained through the experience and/or afterwards in interaction with others’ (Cremin, 2015:9)

The teachers made many changes in their practice, for example, through an audit of reading resources, enhancing access to a greater variety of texts, including popular culture, non-fiction, and books made by the children. They adapted the spaces and places, the
times and frequency of when reading took place, and promoted the importance of enjoying reading to families.

Cremin (2015) notes that teachers can often lack confidence in teaching reading creatively and fostering independent reading for pleasure, relying on a narrow range of texts that they are familiar with. Through making considerable changes in practice and provision the teachers in the project grew their confidence and repertoires, enhancing their competence in becoming conduits of reading for pleasure.

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Practitioners

Literature and Network Context

In the Government drive for Educational Excellence Everywhere (DfE, 2016) they acknowledge that research into teacher retention

‘consistently identifies that teachers enjoy working with children...and take pride in teaching them and supporting them to develop and grow in maturity’ but that ‘unnecessary workload...frustrates teachers and erodes their energy, and are the biggest factors of teachers choosing to leave the profession.’ (DfE, 2016:36)

Owen, writing for the Times Educational Supplement (Feb 2017), reported that 51.8% of the teaching profession is working excessive hours for free, a higher proportion than almost any other occupational group. He refers to the general Secretary of the National Union of Teachers saying that,

‘this situation is untenable. Long and unmanageable working hours are the biggest single reason cited by teachers for leaving the profession...It is the Government’s obsession with continual change alongside punitive accountability and assessment measures which has created this problem.’

Due to this existing situation in many schools, throughout the Early Years Literacy Network Project there was always increased potential for tension between facilitating teachers to develop and grow their pedagogical thinking through supportive challenge of classroom practice and trying to maintain a realistic level of commitment to the project on their part. Teachers were expected to attend all sessions (paid for by the local authority) and complete all gap tasks which were designed to ensure they took action in their teaching to make changes on the basis of their ‘guided’ research. The project was not aimed at adding to unnecessary workload but hoped that the additional work related requirements would be kept in balance by the teachers themselves and justified by gains for the teachers, children and school.

It is necessary here to applaud the participating teachers as, whilst the network hours were facilitated within the working week, the other hours of study, journaling and research writing was drawn from teacher’s own time, already stretched with additional unpaid hours. All the teachers reported to the facilitator, at various points in the process, that this was a difficult act to balance.

The teachers took part in the project both as an integral part of classroom practice and as additional action research, demanding of them not only a commitment of time for study but also a rigour in changing their practice to achieve higher outcomes for children. This
was no mean feat, and unsurprisingly some of the conflicts for them in doing so played out throughout the project and within their case studies.

It is important to be clear that in this project the teachers had not been identified as poor teachers, but the schools had been identified as having lower than expected outcomes at the end of the EYFSP. However, by the very nature of the invitation to join the project some of the teachers shared that they felt this to be the case, especially at the start. The project was designed to challenge teachers to think about their attitudes and approach to teaching literacy, to take time to focus on their own learning, and to promote change in practice to raise outcomes for children.

The Sutton Trust (2012, cited in MacLeod et al. 2015:76), when discussing the importance of high quality teaching and how significantly this affects pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds in particular, state that ‘for poor pupils the difference between a good teacher and a bad teacher is a whole year’s learning’.

It is clear from the case study reflections that the teachers are passionate about improving outcomes for children, enjoy working with children very much, but also feel pressurized within their work, and the project added to that pressure. They comment too on the benefits of having taken part in the project and the personal impact it has had on them as practitioners.

**Practitioners: Project Statistical Findings**

Twelve teachers began the project in September 2015 in 11 schools, with one school (two teachers) leaving after the first year. Ten teachers continued into 2016 and presented their showcase of work at the North Somerset Early Years Conference in February 2017. This was a significant milestone in the project. The final section of work was an action research case study narrative, building on the work presented in the showcase. Eight teachers were able to complete this. All teachers taking part have been represented in this research report through the themes that emerged.

**Practitioners: Teacher Case Study Findings and Reflections**

*Showcase:* ‘I wanted to ensure that I did not miss my own chance to talk and share what I have learned so far through the network at the showcase, although I felt apprehensive to share my views with other practitioners, who I thought may feel my ideas were too simplistic, obvious or outdated. I was thrilled to find this was not the case...I actually now feel that the showcase validated what I have spent the last two years trying to accomplish.’

Banwell
‘We need to give children ownership. We noticed that the highest levels of engagement came when the ideas started from the children and were developed through high quality, collaborative discussions. This is not always easy, however, in a challenging education environment where pressure to attain and achieve can influence the way in which we direct children in their learning. This will be an ongoing challenge for us, however evidencing the impact on learning will support this.’

‘Personally, I love the idea of not knowing what our next project or line of inquiry will be. After teaching Reception aged children for such a long period of time it is so exciting to allow children to take the lead and shape their provision. Our job will be to provide an environment which enables that to happen.’

Becket

‘My journey over the past two years has taken a very steep path, but it is one that I would not change and it is one that I am very passionate about.’

‘Sharing our Project with colleagues at the Early Years Conference was a daunting experience. I was fearful that other practitioners may feel that everything we were doing was ‘nothing new’ and that I’d be ‘teaching grannies to suck eggs’. However, the response I received was very positive. As I engaged in conversations, I became more confident about sharing our ideas. Other people liked what we were doing and I was able to engage in mutually respectful exchanges of ideas and experiences.’

‘To begin with, our flexibility and our desire to respond to the children’s interests almost made our workload impossible as we strived to change the environment and introduce totally new provocations on a weekly basis. As the Project has progressed, we reflected upon our practice and became smarter about the way we planned. For example, by always having certain areas set up but improving the enhancements on a weekly basis.’

Castlebatch

‘I would like to believe that the work that my team and I have carried out during this project would have been something we would have done anyway. I consider a major part of a teacher’s role is to evaluate, develop and facilitate quality teaching and learning for individuals ...there will always be something else to improve upon.’

Churchill
‘I had got to the point in my career where I didn’t know if I could continue teaching. I absolutely love working with four and five year olds and the fact that every single day is as unique as the children that fill my classroom, but I felt that everything I enjoyed and knew was right about teaching in the early years was slowly diminishing and with it my love of the job. There was massive conflict in values. As an early years specialist, I know how vital play is for children but in reality the paperwork, accountability and pressures from leaders meant that the balance had been tipped off the scale.’

‘Ensuring that reading and writing float on a sea of talk has raised the children’s outcomes in literacy and has given me back my love of teaching!’

St Nicholas Chantry

‘I feel strongly that I want to make a difference to the lives of all children in my class and have a positive impact on their learning and development. The early years are such a pivotal stage in a child’s life and I want to do all that I can to prevent as many children as possible growing up into disaffected adults, by providing them with the very best start in their education and development. I feel this project is supporting me to do this...I have already begun to make a difference and improve children’s outcomes in their early years.’

‘I have grown in confidence and have deepened my understanding of what constitutes effective practice in the early years. I have also learned how to adapt my own teaching methods and techniques and to utilise resources to gain maximum effect in promoting the attainment of literacy. It has been an enlightening experience and something that is now embedded in my practice...’

Walliscote

‘As the learning environment began to change, richer in language and becoming less rigid in structure, the shift in my emotions altered. My previous anxiety of ‘fitting the project in’ to embedding the project into my daily practice began, thus allowing the project to begin effectively. The ideology of the ripple effect of the children was simple: introduce new strategies for a target group and embed the positive outcome to all.’

‘Entering the second year of the project my professional confidence had grown significantly alongside my personal self-assurance in knowing my decisions were sound...it was not a question of creating an additional workload but simply enabling more opportunities for the fundamental learning to take place.’

Windwhistle
'I welcomed the opportunity to explore and analyse our literacy, and particularly our writing provision, with the familiar challenge of engaging boys in writing in the early years.'

'Giving myself permission to approach teaching and learning...with a much higher emphasis upon child led learning has renewed my confidence and enthusiasm for my Early Years practice.'

Wraxall

Practitioners: School Impact Findings and Quotes

**Teacher:** Network opportunities - the best part and had most influence...very lucky to be a part of network, to have opportunity to learn about and reflect upon current research.

**Head teacher:** EY team worked incredibly hard to embed outstanding practice in EYFS and children making fantastic progress.

Banwell

**Teacher:** Excited to be part of project enabling visibility of impact of practice.

Castlebatch

**Teacher:** Built teacher confidence and excitement of literacy teaching...Network project has given me back my love of teaching

**Head teacher:** Bright future for this project in our school, not only impact on Early Years but shared through school community as believe the messages at the heart of the project can be beneficial for us all.

St Nicholas Chantry

**Teacher:** Enjoyed taking part in project...It has been an enlightening experience.

Walliscote

**Teacher:** Project has been a significant learning journey... Reflection network sessions with other teachers/highly qualified practitioners has been vital in developing my own teaching ethos and understanding... Being bold, being reflective ...enabled me to say this worked because...enabled me to become a more effective practitioner.
Empowering professionals  |  Theme 8 Practitioners

**Head teacher:** Teacher thoroughly enjoyed taking part in showcase...Professional practice extended and developed by Project and significant impact beyond classroom too.

Windwhistle

**Teacher:** Network has been very informative, interesting ideas and reports discussed.

Worle

**Teacher:** Valued time able to spend with colleagues – offered reassurance.

**Teaching assistant:** Journey been a positive one as teacher involvement in project has generated discussion, reflection, growth for all of us as professionals.

**Year 1 teacher:** Appreciated professional dialogue able to engage in with teacher now...Witnessed her provision change as she has developed her thinking...Showcase showed amount of work put into project and helped others appreciate it.

Wraxall

**Practitioners: Summary**

It is pertinent to note that the teachers in the Early Years Literacy Network project mirror those nationally who responded to *The Hundred Review* in experiencing ‘a top down pressure in Year Reception (YR) to move practice towards a more formal approach’ (Early Excellence 2017:10) which contrasts somewhat with ‘there is a strong belief amongst YR Practitioners, Teachers and School Leaders that an important part of the purpose of YR should be to engender young children’s love of learning’ (Early Excellence 2017:4). Several of the teachers had lost enthusiasm and confidence in their teaching practice through this conflict of positions and it is clear that their participation in the network meetings and the showcase, in particular, restored energy and enthusiasm to their practice and grew their confidence and enjoyment as early years practitioners.

‘Increasingly, the self of the researcher is being seen as important for research’ (Mukherji & Albon, 2010:159). The process of growing the teacher’s importance as practitioners and researchers throughout the project, despite adding to their workload, appears to have grown their professional confidence. Reflexivity is demonstrated here where the practitioners have been impacted upon and changed as a result of the research itself. The ‘self of the researcher is in constant flux’ (Mukherji & Albon, 2010:159) and this is clear from the case studies, resulting in a shift for some from less confident or de-motivated teachers to becoming positive, enthused and motivated practitioners. A significant transformation took place within many of the teachers where their confidence in the network meetings visibly blossomed as they redefined their position as practitioners and
researchers who ‘engender young children’s love of learning’ (Early Excellence 2017:4) which became a catalyst for their own love of learning.

References


Pedagogy

**Literature and Network Context**

Rinaldi (2006) states that to learn the meaning of teaching (or pedagogy), what is of greatest importance is supporting teachers to discover the connection between theory and practice, and to ‘give them the feeling, the emotional feeling, that their place – their metaphysical place – is the connection, the meeting place between theory and practice’ (Rinaldi, 2006:194).

Through the Early Years Literacy Network Project it was hoped that not only would teachers be supported to reflect and know about their own practice but also what they think and theorise about how children learn and their place within that. The project methodology aimed to identify and develop pedagogical thinking by considering research works in the public domain, their own impact on classroom practice and children’s learning and collaborative shared thinking through network meetings.

Teachers are ‘custodians of literacy in their classrooms’ (Mottram & Collins, no date:31) and this inevitably meant that the action research project was practitioner based and focused on learning; involving practitioners accepting responsibility for their own actions in literacy teaching (McNiff et al., 2003).

It became clear early on in the network project that there was a tension between the education system and perceived expectations of how to teach literacy skills and the teachers’ personal beliefs about how young children learn. There was a sense of teachers feeling pulled in opposite directions between the two positions. It is poignant to note that Ofsted (2015:5) concur that ‘setting up teaching and play as opposites is a false dichotomy’, however, teachers perceived that Ofsted pressures on schools to ‘perform’ were imposing just such a dichotomy.

It was helpful to underpin the network with the pedagogy that it was possible to do both, to teach and play or to learn and play in the child’s case. In a paper by Child Australia, they discuss pedagogy (2011: no page) ‘it is important for educators to understand that intentional teaching/intentionality can occur in child initiated and educator directed learning experiences and intentional teaching can be planned or spontaneous.’

In order to assist the teachers with merging the two ‘opposites’ of play and teaching they were introduced to Giacopini’s powerful concept of children ‘reading the world’. Speaking at the Sightlines Conference in 2015 she urged educationalists to view places of education as the ‘school of life’ where a curriculum is intrinsically ‘within’ the community. It is where children have real materials and experiences offered to them building their memories of
their relationship with those experiences and materials. She maintains that children need to be able to:

‘research into meaning’ as they love to have ‘different view-points and points of view, different perspectives from which to look at and explore their world’. (Giacopini, 2015)

This resonated deeply with the teacher action research as a way for them to develop ‘alternative ways of seeing’ teaching and learning (Clough & Nutbrown, 2017). Could the teachers become more child-like in some ways, by enjoying taking different view-points or viewing points of their own practice and pedagogy? Could they also view differently the children’s meaning-making and learning, to develop even richer experiences that enable children to follow their deep engagement with the experience, ensuring those memories of connectivity to that learning experience?

Giacopini (2015) goes on to say that children are ‘constant researchers’ engaging with the dialogue between their interior self and the exterior world outside through the relationship between the two. Children seek meaning from the world wanting to know ‘what is written here?’ She puts forward that life is ‘full of writing’ such as in pattern, natural objects or natural and man-made markings and that children show a curiosity and passion for wanting to explore that meaning.

Additionally, Giacopini (2015) puts forward that, as adults, we do not have the whole truth about children’s learning; we are partial in the sense that the culture or adults ideas about a child’s learning is not always what a child would choose. She urges adults’ to have dialogue with children in order to bring out into the community the culture that is expressed by children. Children must participate, which means be a part of something.

It is useful here to revisit Rich, Drummond & Myer’s (2008) pedagogical statements that the teachers were asked to gain children’s participation with.

- Learners learn all the time
- Learners choose
- Learners need a generous environment
- Learners learn everywhere
- Learners love learning
- Learners make meaning
- Learners represent their learning
- Learners make stories
- Learners take time
- Learners voice their learning

Not only were these statements a way of encouraging teachers to promote participation from the children in changes to classroom practice, but they also directly linked with
processes within the network for the teachers, for example, as a teacher learner they choose their study focus, represented their learning through learning logs and discussion, made their own narrative or ‘story’, found their voice and made meaning in their own learning.

Barrett (2014) outlines that as children are social beings teachers must provide opportunities to empower them to express their experiences both in oral and written form, warning that ‘unless this happens, this very sense of self is at risk... Children’s voices need to be nurtured because of this link with developmental identity and the sense of who they are’. (Barrett, 2014: 196)

Just as children are social beings and having their voices heard helps to develop their identity, so too are teachers. The Early Years Literacy Network project was an opportunity for them to have their voices heard, to be nurtured into ‘knowing’ their own pedagogical identity by making it more visible to themselves and others. At the start of the project the teacher’s sense of self could be said to have been ‘at risk’ as outlined by some of their responses to being asked about how they felt to be taking part in the project. The main themes emerging were as follows:

- Uncertainty and apprehension, including feeling ‘out of my depth’, mainly cited around the unknown additional workload
- An awareness that their involvement was ‘data driven’ and that they may have something new to learn
- A hope that their new learning would ‘help to reduce the pressure’ from Year 1 teachers in regards to children’s writing achievements at the end of the EYFS
- An openness and excitement about new learning that would refresh teaching and give ideas for moving forward. For example, some identified that they were looking forward to ‘the challenge’ and ‘the learning journey’

At the end of the project they were asked to share what the project had revealed to them about themselves. Strong correlations between teacher confidence, and a repositioning of pedagogical identity emerged with a consolidated ‘sense of self’ or reflexivity. The main themes emerging were that they:

- Really enjoyed learning
- Were reflective practitioners and ‘think a lot’
- Could make a difference to children and were keen to do so
- Confirmed they wanted to be teachers of children in the early years especially
- Were capable and confident and able to solve problems
- Were more creative than they knew initially and also very practical
- Could share their pedagogy with others and this could influence other teachers’ practice
- Were braver than they realised
‘Learning is the emergence of that which was not there before... it is a search for the self... so professional development is simply learning: our job is to learn why we are teachers’ (Rinaldi, 2006:141).

The teachers came to know or reaffirm themselves through the study, how they put their chosen theory into practice, and how they were central participants in the meaning making they created with the children. Fittingly summed up within a children’s story book, in the words of A.A. Milne and Winnie the Pooh:

‘You are braver than you believe,
stronger than you seem,
and smarter than you think.’

Pedagogy: Teacher Case Study Findings and Reflections

‘We talked to the children about their learning and what new learning might look like. We began to use every opportunity for children to explain their learning and share it with everyone else. Now the children are much more responsible for their own learning, they are inquisitive, resilient and evaluative.’

‘My two year journey through the project and my time in Early Years has reignited my passion for teaching. I feel as though I am teaching again rather than following a lesson plan. The project has allowed me more autonomy and given me time and opportunities to reflect upon my practice. I find myself constantly responding to the children’s learning, to be thinking of ways to improve my skills and enhance our provision. I have made a large emotional investment in each individual’s learning and I feel a huge sense of pride with every single step of their achievement....I have the best job in the world!’

Castlebatch

‘I have applied new (and old) thinking, research and strategies to my classroom practice and have shared this with our Foundation Stage leader and team... it feels like the project gave me ‘permission’ to focus on oral work... it has made me realise the importance of truly embedding the skills needed to read and write in a playful, relaxed and supportive environment... I revisited and changed pedagogy, processes and provision.’

St Nicholas Chantry
'Browne (2001) believes the capability to question impacts the ability to learn. My teaching allowed children the time to ask questions and find meaning to the words they heard. This enriched their vocabulary, allowing them to become more verbal and reach better outcomes in the EYFS...significant impact the focus on a language rich environment has had on children’s confidence and desire to explore their own voice in the classroom.’

‘The Literacy Project has refocused my values. The ethos of creating an environment where children feel valued, confident to be heard and to learn through exploring their interests.’

‘Moving forward the message of Montessori (1907) remains at the heart of my practice ‘Every child can learn. If children are not learning, adults are not listening carefully enough’.

Windwhistle

‘Giving myself the permission to approach teaching and learning generally (but with a focus on writing...) with a much higher emphasis upon child-led learning has renewed my confidence and enthusiasm for my early years practice.

Wraxall

Pedagogy: School Impact Report Findings and Quotes

Teacher: Very lucky to be part of the network, to have the opportunity to learn about and reflect on current research...Completely reassessed how I teach literacy... Network opportunities the best part and had most influence.

Banwell

Teacher: Excited to be part of project enabling visibility of impact of practice.

Castlebatch

Teacher: Network project has given me back my love of teaching.

Head teacher: Has encouraged us to review our practice in all areas of early literacy and had profound effect on the children and staff.

St Nicholas Chantry
**Teacher:** It has been an enlightening experience...Deepened own knowledge and understanding of what constitutes effective practice in the early years.

**Head teacher:** Will leave a legacy of good practice for use in future.

**Governor:** Good to hear that research is leading to change in practice and provision and it seems to be having a real impact.

**Walliscote**

**Teacher:** Looked at my practice with a fresh pair of eyes – on teaching and learning – reflected on this – achievement of children has increased.

**Teaching assistant:** Journey been a positive one as teacher involvement in project has generated discussion, reflection, growth for all of us as professionals.

**Governor:** I have been very encouraged by the positive impact the project has had on thinking, teaching and learning and therefore outcomes for children.

**Wraxall**

**Pedagogy: Summary**

The network process enabled the collaborative construction of learning (Rinald, 2006) not only for the facilitator and teachers but for staff, parents and children in the school as indicated through the qualitative and quantitative data.

A changing understanding and clarity around the teaching and learning of literacy metamorphosed during the project, revealing itself through discussion, classroom practice and reflection. The network process, especially the showcase to other professionals, where teachers presented their own point of view acted as a ‘catalyst for the fundamental process of meta-cognition (knowledge of knowledge) providing an opportunity for the ‘re-knowing’ of (their) knowledge in a different light enriched by the new and different opinions offered by others.’ (Rinaldi, 2006:127)

‘The greatest effects upon students learning occur when teachers become learners of their own teaching, and when students become their own teachers...it matters what teachers do but what matters most is having an appropriate mind frame relating to the impact of what they do’ (Hattie: no date:21)

The teachers’ ontology – ‘the question of what (they) are looking at’ – and their epistemology – the method of ‘how they look and find out about these things’ – became their empirical knowledge drawn from experience (Thomas, 2009: 86-87). By viewing their world differently they were able to gain different pedagogical knowledge and new learning.
This enabled them to influence children’s progress and outcomes differently and to better understand their impact in doing so. Embodied in the network and action research process when considering teaching and pedagogy (theory-making) the words of Gussin-Paley (1990:16) seem fitting:

‘Until I had my own questions to ask, my own set of events to watch, and my own way of combining all these with teaching, I did not learn very much at all.’

References


Milne, A.A. Winnie the Pooh – The House at Pooh Corner
Diving for Pearls

Teachers’ Case Studies
It all comes back to talk

By Sarah Kent

Banwell Primary is a village school in North Somerset. The school has around 200 pupils, organised into seven single year group classes. In the Reception class there are 2 part-time teachers and 2 part-time teaching assistants. The current Reception class has 25 children in total. A large proportion of the children attend the village pre-school (currently rated outstanding by Ofsted), from the age of 2 or 3 before coming to our school.

When we were invited to join the Early Years Literacy Network organised by North Somerset Early Years Team, I was an experienced Early Years teacher. I enjoyed teaching children the basics of early literacy, particularly reading stories, and knew the importance of good quality speaking and listening learning experiences for children at home and in pre-schools before they begin school, and conversely the impact it has on their ability to enjoy learning to read and write if these experiences have not been part of their daily lives.

Since I joined the project at the start of Session 2, I have worked alongside 3 other teachers in a job-share role due to the timings of maternity leave. This has presented its own challenges alongside completing such an intensive project as a part-time teacher, as I had the same deadlines for data and gap tasks as full time teachers taking part in the project. The support of all of my job-share colleagues has been invaluable to the success of the project in our school, as they have implemented changes and new ideas in their own practice with enthusiasm and encouragement.

I now feel privileged to have been selected for inclusion in this network project as I have learned from sharing ideas with other teachers in the network. These are ideas that have been implemented and developed by real teachers in real classrooms with real children and they have been proven to work and engage children when reading and writing.

I have changed many things in my teaching due to my involvement in the project that have impacted positively upon the learning of children in both classes. For the purpose of this case study I have chosen to focus upon how I have supported the development of speaking and listening in my classroom, the effect that this has had upon the ability of the children to learn sounds in phonics and to learn to read. The focus of the very first meeting of the network was that ‘reading and writing float on a sea of talk’ Britton (1970). At the start of
the project in 2015, nationally 1 in 4 children didn’t reach the expected level of language development by the age of five, and this was the case in our school too. I wanted to find out how I could ensure that the acquisition of language was strengthened and enriched during our involvement in the project for the children in our next two cohorts.

So, the development of speaking and listening and the enrichment of our provision became the key focus for our project, which was identified from our school data. We also noticed as an EYFS Team, that there has been a steady decline in children beginning their schooling with a good understanding of language and the ability to talk and communicate effectively with others. This may have a correlation with the sharp rise in the population as a whole finding new ways to use technology as a form of communication, and the development of social media communication as opposed to talking to each other and conversing face to face.

In their article ‘Talking into Literacy in the Early Years’, Button and Millward (2005:34) state:

‘Children talk at home to get things done and they take responsibility for initiating topics and for developing these in ways that interest them. They come to school as experienced language users, used to talking and listening. They will have discovered that language works and that talking is effective. Of course, teachers have a responsibility to guide children into literacy, but their first task is to help the children to talk as effectively in school as they do at home, by giving a higher status to talk in the classroom.”

Whilst agreeing with their view about the importance of developing talk in class, and the resulting impact this should have upon learning in literacy, this raised the question for me: ‘Would the authors of this research say the same now?’ It has only been 12 years since their research was published, but the evidence we see in class is that children do not always come to school ‘used to talking and listening’, and do not always have vocabulary rich home lives. Schools can often now be more effective in encouraging the development of talk in children than their home environments.

At the network meeting in February 2016, we studied the National Literacy Trust (2013) report showing links between child poverty and poor literacy. The report referred to research completed about the amount of words children hear by the age of three, and that early intervention is the most effective way to improve outcomes.

“Other research has demonstrated that the literacy gap emerges before school; one study found that by the age of three, children from the most prosperous households have heard 30 million more words than children from impoverished households.” (Hart and Risley, 2003, cited in McCoy, 2013:5).
This is a concern for our school, as our current cohort of Reception children has 28% of children in receipt of Pupil Premium funding.

In class, this focus upon improving vocabulary and good communication meant that I wanted to develop the vocabulary and bank of words that the children were able to use when talking to each other at school and at home, and also to ensure that alongside this ability to say words, they also developed their understanding of the meaning of words too. I was constantly on the look out to seize the unexpected opportunities that were there for enhancing meaning. This meant that instead of just introducing a word to read or write featuring a new sound we were learning that day, I did a quick check that we all had the same shared understanding of what that word could mean. This was probably the biggest revelation of the project for me – don’t just assume that, because you know what you as a teacher are talking about, the children are thinking of the same thing. For example, the word ‘rag’ – the Jolly Phonics scheme (Lloyd et al., 2009), for teaching phonics, has a song for the sound ‘r’ that features the word ‘rag’ and instead of just writing this word, as I would have done previously, I asked the children what a ‘rag’ was.

Only 1 child out of 27 (not one of the children in the 2015-2016 literacy network target group) knew the correct meaning for the word, the rest of the children confused it with the word ‘rug’ (and incidentally even the picture of the puppy in the scheme looks as if it is standing on and biting a red rug), giving various suggestions about ‘small carpets’. As a result of this I made sure that whatever words we were focusing on to learn to read or write we would always have a shared explanation or understanding of what it meant. It is now almost like a game of word ping-pong that bounces across the room as the children share their thinking, and make connections between words and ideas.

The development of our outdoor area during the first year of the project meant that through consultation with the other members of the EYFS Team, I deliberately selected resources that encouraged collaborative play and therefore increased the quality and quantity of interactions between children when completing child-initiated activities. Immediately upon being set up these resources had a positive impact. One great example was the stands, piping, guttering, balls, boats and water. The children had to work cooperatively when playing with this equipment as they couldn’t be in all the places where the balls would run, so this provided lots of opportunities for ‘engineering’ talk and terminology, negotiation, evaluation and discussion as problems were solved and connections made.

This positive development in the communication skills and understanding of vocabulary of the children could not be developed in isolation, however. It was crucial to the success of the project that we were also able to include parents as well. I can see from the evidence in my Learning Log, that this was something that I was doing a lot of thinking about at that time.
Parents face many challenges in finding time to talk with children at home – in my log I called this talk ‘quality talk’ or ‘talk where you are both in the room’. I also thought it important to highlight here that children need both time to talk and to listen. There are so many pressures upon time, and distractions for parents at home now, such as having to work long hours, technology-based distractions, such as work e-mails, social networking and mobile technology, that children are often having to come second to this. By giving children speaking and listening games to play at home we were able to demonstrate the importance we placed as a school upon speaking and listening activities, and raise their profile by identifying this as some ‘homework’ that needed to be completed at home. This also gave parents ideas for fun games and activities they could play and entertain children with at times when the opportunity arises to put down their tablets.

We had an expectation that all parents were to attend our Parents’ Evenings, regardless of how hard to reach they may have been in the past, and arranged alternative times for non-attenders, so that we could share with them and their children the progress that they had made and their next steps for learning. We took this opportunity to also ask the parents to share what they did with their children to read for enjoyment and what their favourite nursery rhymes were - again highlighting to parents the importance that school places on children being able to share and recite rhymes.

We also discussed at the network meeting in February 2016 about how reading is about free will and enjoyment, so we need to make use of popular culture materials and e-books to encourage children to read and write more often at home. Thinking together of how we could harness the positive aspects of children having access to technology in their homes, we then shared the Oxford Owls free e-book library website (Oxfordowl.co.uk, 2017), at an information meeting with our parents so they can all access e-books at home. We also ‘magpied’ the idea of using stickers of superheroes or other figures that the children like to encourage the children to write about them during child-initiated activities. The children now choose to use these in class on a daily basis.

At the end of the first year of the Literacy Network Project, we were very pleased that the GLD that the children achieved at the end of the EYFS at Banwell had increased by over 6% overall, and 7 out of the 12 children who were identified as target children that year who had been at risk of not achieving a GLD actually did so.

At the beginning of the second year, therefore, I was aware of what I thought had made a positive impact upon the development of literacy for our children, and resolved to do more of it!

Having this at the forefront of my mind, I found when I was completing Step 1 Phonics, using the Learning Exchange Phonics Programme (Boardman et al., 2015), at the start of the second year of the project, I naturally took more of an interest in the fact that for the first term our children would be focusing upon hearing and orally saying sounds in words,
rather than starting to learn phoneme and grapheme correspondences, as they do at the very start of the year in many Reception classes.

This was also a time that our school had decided to escalate our involvement in Learning Without Limits (2017), where barriers to learning are removed so all children can achieve and no ceiling is placed upon their ability. We were also all developing projects with the children, and making learning more visible for them through the development of Learning Journeys that looped ideas, skills and key thinking and enabled the children to make links in their learning.

As a result I devised a Learning Journey for Step 1. I didn’t feel it was enough this time to randomly make up activities that had a Step 1 focus in isolation – I wanted to teach and enable the children to learn something every day that would make them all ready to learn sounds, when the time came at the start of Term 2. At the very start of the journey was the loop for ‘I can show you good listening.’ We looked for examples in class where good listening was shown, took photos of it and then discussed together why we felt good listening was apparent. This again worked on our collective shared understanding of what good listening is, so all children, especially summer born boys, for example, had actually been taught what this looks and sounds like, which gave them more chance of understanding how to do it before we moved onto the next loop that actually required good listening to achieve it.

The other Learning Loops for this journey focused upon sound talking, keeping a steady beat, rhyming, alliteration, joining in and having fun and understanding sequencing (first, middle and last). I feel that all these loops or steps are crucial to learning how to blend sounds and segment words to read and write, and if they are missed because schools are focusing on starting to teach sounds too quickly, it hinders the Learning Without Limits (2017), principle of ‘Everyone’ being able to achieve, as some children will be less likely to be ready to retain what they are learning.

Feeling so positively about the impact of having talk as a focus for raising performance in reading and writing in our school, combined with the Learning Loops and Learning Without Limits Principles (2017), and pace of learning sounds from the Learning Exchange Phonics Programme (Boardman et al., 2015), I chose this as the focus for my Early Years Conference showcase.

My experiences had made me realise that we must not miss our chance with the children in the classroom to talk, because investing time in speaking and listening in the Reception class actually has a positive rather than a negative impact upon children’s future ability to read and write. I wanted to ensure that I also did not miss my own chance to talk and share what I have learned so far through the network at the showcase, although I felt apprehensive to share my views with other practitioners, who I thought may feel my ideas were too simplistic, obvious or outdated. I was thrilled to find this was not the case, in fact, the more I attempted to engage
people who were looking at my display featuring the speaking and listening Learning Loops that I had devised for Step 1 and Step 2 Phonics, the more they shared their own classroom experiences which mirrored my own. I actually now feel that the showcase experience validated what I have spent the last two years trying to accomplish. It was also useful to be given tips from showcase visitors for where to look next to develop my thinking.

As a teacher I have always been very open to change and to reflecting upon my practice to find where I can make positive transformations to what happens in the classroom. I feel lucky to be part of a network of teachers, and to work alongside job-share teachers, who feel the same and have inspired me with so many practical ideas that have promoted reading and writing in our class to such an extent that the enjoyment and fulfilment that the children get from self-chosen literacy activities is evident in the amount of time they all choose to do this.

I am very interested to now find out more about the Read on, Get on campaign to improve rates of literacy amongst the most disadvantaged children that attend our school and their parents.

‘Well-trained and inspirational primary teachers are achieving great literacy results and are a critical resource in poor communities. In addition to this families who encourage just ten minutes of reading a day with a child can make a huge difference.’

‘Children learn to read and then read to learn’ (Save the Children, 2015:iv)

This is so true, as the ability to read impacts upon every other subject that the children study at school regardless of where their talents and abilities lie. That is why it is so important that together children, parents and schools do the very best that they can to ensure all children become confident, successful and lifelong readers. We can ensure we get this right by not missing out on our daily opportunities to talk and to listen to each other.

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What motivates boys to write?
A study of intrinsic motivation in the Reception Classroom

By Michelle Channon

The context for this research project is a 30 place Reception Class within a small, one form entry primary school in Weston super Mare. Historically, Becket Primary School’s community has had a high proportion of families from socially deprived backgrounds, with most families living in our immediate geographic area of Preanes Green, Worle. In recent years however we have noticed a shift in the composition of our yearly intake. Becket has become a school of choice for many families and we have become over-subscribed and now receive families from a wider geographical area, and a broader scope of social backgrounds.

Having taught Reception Class at Becket Primary School for 8 years it has been possible to track a pattern of trends over time. Our on entry data scores show that year on year children arrive in our school significantly below the national average in both literacy development and communication and language development. Most notably in the communication and language area of learning, children’s vocabulary is more limited than we would have expected, which as well as impacting on their literacy development, impacts hugely on their social skills. The National Literacy Trust research paper (2013) reports that “by age three, children from prosperous households have heard 30 million more words than from impoverished households.” (Hart & Risley, 2008, cited in McCoy, 2013:5)

As an Early Years teacher I recognise the huge role we have to play in developing children’s oral skills in order to have an impact on children’s literacy development. The I CAN TALK publication (2006) further supports this idea by stating that effective oral and language skills provide the building blocks on which later literacy and numeracy development are based. The need to enable children to make accelerated progress in communication and language fuelled my initial thinking for this project. I was also greatly influenced by the research I was introduced to through the North Somerset Literacy Network that ‘Reading and writing float on a sea of talk’ Britton (1970). Through this research I understood that the development of writing would only come if we fostered children’s abilities to communicate.

However, although communication and language is fundamentally important for overall development, our end of year outcomes show that writing, especially for boys, is the lowest attaining strand within the 7 areas of learning in the EYFS, and has been year on
year. It became clear that ‘boy’s writing and communication’ should become the focus for our research. My initial collection of ideas were broad and covered several areas including:

- Our data story
- Developing boy’s language and vocabulary
- Physical development (Gross Motor)
- Inside and outside mark making
- Are my literacy areas gender specific?
- What motivates boys?
- Writing opportunities at home

It was difficult to narrow this down at first, to become more focused. Working with my Early Years team we unpicked the fundamentals of what was actually holding boys back from achieving in writing.

We decided that ensuring boys had multiple, high quality opportunities to develop their physical skills was of paramount importance. Bryce-Clegg (2013) states

‘Before we get onto palm grips and pencils, we need to consider the other essential elements that children need to have to enable them to be successful mark makers and writers. These are the things that children who find the early stages of mark making easy, learn quickly’

Based on my initial thinking around language development we decided to include this as a line of enquiry also, and a personal interest in developing boy’s intrinsic motivation to write gave us three clear areas to research, the latter of which was highly influenced by a larger piece of work that our whole school was embarking on.

In terms of what that would look like within our provision I knew I wanted to ensure:

- Boys were physically able and ready to write
- Boys had something to write, based on their own ideas, thoughts and feelings
- The need to communicate those ideas, thoughts and feelings was so strong that it provided an intrinsic motivation to communicate through mark making

Myhill & Fisher (2010:no page) acknowledge that:

“Writing is a complex task. It requires the coordination of fine motor skills and cognitive skills, reflects the social and cultural patterns of the writer’s time and is also linguistically complex.”

This definition validated the research base I had decided upon.

I made many changes to my provision throughout the duration of my research study based on the 3 fundamental aspects above, however for this paper I have decided to focus on the impact on communication and mark making by developing boy’s intrinsic motivation to write and communicate their ideas.
Intrinsic motivation is defined as ‘An incentive to do something that arises from factors within the individual, such as a need to feel useful or to seek self-actualization’ (oxfordreference.com). This internal need to do something is not driven by external factors, for example rewards or praise, it comes from within the child and is a very powerful driver.

‘Intrinsic goal framing (relative to extrinsic goal framing) produces deeper engagement in learning activities, better conceptual learning, and higher persistence at learning activities’ (Vansteenkiste, Lens & Deci, 2010: no page).

In regards to mark making and writing I wanted to find ways to inspire and encourage boys’ need to write, a need to communicate with others far beyond the need to please an adult or receive a reward. In Early Years we are used to following children’s interests, and this is often attempted by following a child initiated topic or theme, but to intrinsically motivate children I felt we needed to go further.

Our school had begun embarking on a new way of working with children based on the EOS Education approach. An inspirational visit to Hartsholme Academy in Lincoln showcased the impact of REAL (Rigorous Engaging Authentic Learning) projects on children’s motivation to learn and the outcomes they could achieve. The main principles behind the approach demand an authentic, real life context for learning, coupled with an authentic, meaningful audience, all inspired by children’s curiosity and desire to solve real life problems that affect them. By using a REAL project I felt we could explore the idea of intrinsic motivation and assess the impact to facilitate this study.

Working with my Reception team we decided to give dedicated time to working responsively in order to support children’s natural curiosity and need to problem solve. During a muddy, morning session in the garden a group of boys thoroughly enjoyed riding the bikes and scooters through a section of muddy grass. A problem arose when the wheels and seats became covered in mud. Through discussion, powered by a need to solve this problem, the boys decided that they would make a bike and scooter wash for our muddy vehicles. This was quickly followed by the question of whether the bikes and scooters that were parked in the bike sheds for the whole school were also muddy and in need of washing. We visited the bike sheds and found that they were. With the REAL project principles in mind we facilitated the boy’s ideas by supporting their discussions around the following ideas:

- What does a real car wash look like?
- What are the rules of a real car wash?
- What resources and materials would we need to make it?
- How would we let the other children know that the bike and scooter wash was happening?
- How would we manage the washing of the bikes and scooters on the day?
Over the next two weeks we visited a local car wash and gathered information to answer our questions. We used the internet to research the names of the types of brushes and sponges we would need. The children were keen to learn the new vocabulary and were able to use this new vocabulary in their own discussions about the bike wash. We made lists of resources we would need to build our bike and scooter wash based on what we had seen on our visit. We noticed that our focus group of boys were extremely engaged in this activity because it had a real purpose and meaning for them. The children were desperate to build the bike wash and so knew that a shopping list of resources was vital. It was interesting to note how vocal the children were about this being a real bike wash, not a pretend one. It was clear that they understood and responded positively to the real life problem we were trying to solve and were determined in their purpose.

We facilitated multiple opportunities for collaborative discussions so that the children felt they had ownership over the project and had an opportunity to use their new vocabulary. We found that the discussions were rich and meaningful because the children had their first hand experiences to draw upon and an intrinsic desire to solve a problem. One strategy which had a positive impact on children’s ability to communicate their ideas was to give time to reflect back on their experiences by using photographs and videos captured on the iPad. Hallet (2016:no page) supports this by stating ‘digital photographs allow children to see themselves playing and learning, and to talk reflectively about their play and learning with adults and other children.’ We found that children were more vocal with their thoughts and ideas when they could look back and reflect on what they had seen and listened to and their thoughts from the time. We decided to incorporate the use of the iPad at all stages of the project to capture the experiences, as well as to support future reflection by both the children and ourselves.

Along with the lists of resources we would need, we found further literacy and mark making opportunities throughout the project. Making a list of rules for the car wash was of high priority for many of the children. This was an independent writing activity and allowed children to apply their emerging phonic knowledge to write words which matched their spoken language, as well as using key vocabulary words which we had displayed. One key feature of the real car wash which the children picked up on was a sign stating ‘No Pedestrians Allowed’. This therefore became a key feature of our bike wash and some children enjoyed making signs incorporating the logo and vocabulary.

Once the bike wash had been built we facilitated two further discussions, firstly, how we would let the rest of the school know that it was open for business, and secondly, how we would manage the bike wash on the day it was opened. Again this gave the children ownership over the project and therefore provided intrinsic motivation.
The children decided that we should inform the rest of the school of our project by sending an email to all the classes with a video attached of us talking. The children knew that email was a successful way of communicating through a recent home link project we had started. The children had the opportunity to prepare a script and share their ideas on the recording. Again we noticed that the children were able to effectively communicate their ideas because they were excited and motivated to do so. Unfortunately the email did not work as it was such a large file so we decided to visit each class and play them our video through iPad airplay, linked to their interactive white boards. The children were more than happy with this as an alternative.

Next the children reflected that in a real car wash you have to pay, so if other children wanted to use our bike wash they should buy tickets and pay 10p each! This provided another mark making activity where the children made tickets to sell to the children who would come and use our service. We allowed the children to design their own tickets and found that most children included a picture of the bike wash, along with some wording.

The day we opened the bike wash to the whole school proved a huge success with 67 customers for our bike and scooter wash service! The children were thrilled and thoroughly embraced the challenge of washing all 67 bikes and scooters in one day. The level of enthusiasm we saw from the children validated our approach to providing opportunities for real life projects, with meaningful contexts that matter to children.

The impact on children’s learning was clear. We noticed that children’s progress in communication and language was accelerated, especially in speaking, as children had something important to say and were motivated to get their ideas across, to both their peers and adults. The project seemed to especially inspire the group of boys who initially came up with the idea through their real life problem and we saw an increase in the number of collaborative discussions and conversations taking place, both in play and adult facilitated discussions.

The impact on children’s attitudes towards mark making was also clear, especially for boys. We saw more boys choosing to engage in mark making activities and applying their emerging phonic skills when they were mark making for a purpose. This had a positive impact on both their progress in writing and physical development.

It was also interesting to note the impact on the adults. We welcomed a new member to our team shortly before the start of this project who had not worked in such a responsive way before. After reflecting on the project she certainly felt more confident in allowing children to take ownership of a project and to work in a more responsive way. For me it validated my experiences at Hartsholme Academy and the research I had done into the REAL projects approach.
I set out to answer the question ‘What motivates boys to write?’ In drawing my conclusions I feel there are four main learning points from this project. I knew I wanted to explore the idea that intrinsic motivation was a key factor in engaging boys to raise attainment and develop positive attitudes. The key to this I believe is developing an environment that enables children to take a lead in their learning.

Firstly, adults need to dedicate time to listening to children and be responsive to their thoughts and ideas. It is only by listening to children that we are able to tune in to what really matters to them.

Secondly, first hand experiences and real life, meaningful contexts are vital to engaging children and developing curiosity and a desire to learn. We observed that having a real problem to solve was essential in developing that intrinsic motivation.

Thirdly, we need to give children ownership. We noticed the highest levels of engagement came when the ideas started from the children and were developed through high quality, collaborative discussions. This is not always easy however in a challenging education environment where pressure to attain and achieve can influence the way in which we direct children in their learning. This will be an on-going challenge for us, however evidencing the impact on learning will support this.

Finally, giving children time to reflect on their experiences has a significant impact on their learning and provides an opportunity for them to plan what to do next. We found the use of an iPad invaluable here and we will continue to use photographs and videos as a tool for reflection.

Going forward our whole team is committed to this way of working and we are excited to see the further impact of developing intrinsic motivation through real projects. We know children are amazing thinkers and have incredible ideas of their own. Personally, I love the idea of not knowing what our next project or line of inquiry will be. After teaching Reception aged children for such a long period of time it is so exciting to allow children to take the lead and shape their provision. Our job will be to provide an environment which enables that to happen.
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How can we encourage our reluctant summer-born boys to want to write?

By Jane Blake

Castle Batch Primary School is a larger than average Primary school in the suburbs of the seaside town of Weston-Super-Mare. It is a two form entry school with an average number of children having SEND, FSM and EAL. There are two Foundation Stage classes. These classes are taught by three teachers (0.8, 0.8, 0.4), a Higher Level Teaching Assistant (HLTA) and Teaching Assistant (TA).

I have been teaching for more than twenty years but only the last two of them have been in Early Years. Although I have been teaching in KS1 for over ten years, I have found teaching in Early Years to be a completely different teaching experience. My journey over the past two years has taken a very steep path, but it is one that I would not change and it is one which I am very passionate about.

I joined our Foundation Stage Team as the Literacy Network Project started and at a very exciting time for our Team. Our 2015-16 school self-evaluation framework (SEF) posed a number of questions for us to consider:

- How will we improve outcomes for boys?
- Are our youngest boys getting the provision they need to make the expected levels? Do we need to increase interaction with these children?
- How do we close the gaps in achievements and progress between our boys and girls?
- Is there an issue for our summer-born boys?

Through professional dialogue, the team reflected upon our current practice and realised that we needed to make a change. Using the experiences and research by Bryce-Clegg, we decided to move away from group work towards a more ‘free flow’ approach where we could scaffold the children’s learning through their play. As our Key Stage Leader pointed out in a report about our Foundation Stage, moving away from group work we would need a robust way of ensuring that all children were receiving high quality, appropriate challenge and support. We moved from planning rotas of activities, to Objective Led Planning which ensured that we knew where every single child was, what their next steps would be and how we would provide enhancements within our setting to support their play.

At the same time, one of our HLTA’s was completing her final year of her BA (Hons) Degree. Her research findings and her action research focused upon the importance of physical development in improving writing and also upon engaging children through popular
culture. We began to wonder if our summer-born boys were actually developmentally ready to write. Could we improve the outcomes of our boys by improving our provision for physical development? Could we close the gaps in achievement and progress between our boys and girls by engaging the boys with popular culture?

‘Well planned Continuous Provision can be an absolute gift when it comes to raising the attainment of children through active learning and high level engagement.’
(Barry-Clegg, 2016)

Our first step in improving our provision was to change our timetable. Children would come together as a class in their own classrooms (Base Time) for certain parts of the day: dough gym; talk time; phonics; Number time and story. The rest of the day would consist of Continuous Provision where the children would be free to choose their learning.

Initially, we identified physical development as a focus area. In an article on their website, Kid Sense Child Development (2017) highlight the main stages of writing readiness: hand and finger strength; crossing the mid line; pencil grasp; hand eye coordination; bilateral integration; upper body strength; object manipulation; visual perception; hand dominance; hand division. We decided to condense these stages into the four physical areas of development: shoulder pivot; elbow pivot; wrist pivot; hand and finger strength (Bryce-Clegg, 2013). Through our Objective Led Planning we introduced activities and resources which would meet the needs of our children. We noticed that most of our children who needed to develop their shoulder, elbow and wrist pivots were choosing to go outside, so this is where we put most of our provision. We provided loose parts and apparatus for the children to make obstacle courses. They used child sized brushes to sweep the playground. They created their own bubbles by pumping washing up liquid laden pieces of foam with their arms. They dipped tennis balls in paint and threw them at black paper to create firework pictures.

During Base Time, we introduced the concept of ‘dough and finger gym disco’. We started off with a whole class approach, copying movements which would help to strengthen different parts of the arm. We then moved on to targeting different children depending upon their physical need and assigning appropriate activities. This ranged from manoeuvring large lumps of dough, to threading Cheerios onto pipe cleaners.

Whilst many of the children keenly accessed the provision, we found that most of our target children, i.e. our summer born boys, were not captured by our provocations and kept disappearing to play with sticks in the bushes. After reflecting upon our observations, we considered Bryce-Clegg’s suggestion of using light sabres for letter formation. As our summer born boys were so keen to play with sticks, we duly covered these sticks with foil and let their imaginations take over. They became light sabres, wizard wands and batons and the boys were keen to practise their letter formation at the beginning of each session.
Planning our provocations using the children’s interests as our starting point became embedded within our practice.

‘That is where these 3 little words ‘thrill, will, skill’ come into their own... Without thrill there is no will to take part and without the will, how will children successfully acquire the skill?’ (Bryce-Clegg, 2014)

We developed themed writing pods to reflect the children’s interests: Power Rangers; Frozen; Super Heroes; Paw Patrol. We sought writing opportunities in all areas of the setting, providing appropriate resources and transportable writing packs which children independently accessed. We scaffolded purposeful writing opportunities through the children’s play. For example, one child was concerned that others might touch their den during the lunch time break, so together we wrote a notice. Another child became annoyed that some children weren’t racing fairly on the bike track so we wrote some rules. After modelling how to carry out a risk assessment of the outdoor area, children spontaneously accessed the clipboards and paper and began to record their own risk assessments. As Frater says,

‘Children need opportunities to experience writing that is relevant and has a real purpose.’ (Barrett 2014:194 cites Frater, 2001)

At the beginning of the project’s second year we implemented all the successful aspects of the first year. However, again our target children preferred to play in the bushes rather than access the provision. So, we decided to take the writing opportunities into the bushes! We set up a Super Hero writing pod under a tarpaulin shelter. The children were certainly motivated by the shelter and were thrilled when Spiderman himself made an appearance and played alongside them. Every single child was inspired and motivated to write.

We strived to provide learning environments which were exciting and motivating. One memorable occasion was the first day of Term Three. Upon arrival at school, the children were surprised and captivated by a room covered in white paper. Their imaginations were immediately lit as they began mark making. They rolled on the paper, took their shoes off and ‘ice-skated’. They were completely immersed for whole sessions creating their own snow scenes and stories.

I think that our approach has had a huge impact upon our children and their attitudes towards writing. Every child in our target group now sees reasons for writing and will choose to write. I feel very fortunate to be part of a passionate team full of the most amazing people who have a strong belief in what they are doing. The energy and enthusiasm of the team shines through and helps to build positive relationships with the children and their parents. To begin with, our flexibility and our desire to respond to the children’s interests almost made our workload impossible as we strived to change the environment and introduce totally new provocations on a weekly basis. As the Literacy Project has progressed, we reflected upon our practice and became smarter about the way
we planned. For example, by always having certain areas set up but improving the enhancements on a weekly basis.

Towards the end of the first year of the project, we became concerned that some children were engaged in low level play without challenging themselves. We did not want to over-direct the children but we did want to ensure that there was a high level of expectation. We began to introduce challenges which we would expect the children to engage in. We talked to the children about their learning and what new learning might look like. We began to use every opportunity for children to explain their learning and share it with everyone else. Now the children are much more responsible for their own learning, they are inquisitive, resilient, and evaluative. Many have become the ‘experts’ in certain areas and have supported their peers. They know why they are learning. One child said at the end of dough gym, “I am good at writing because I do Dough Gym. I have smaller writing than my big brother!”

We have shared our new approach in Foundation Stage with the rest of the school during a Staff Meeting. We were pleasantly surprised by the enthusiasm of our colleagues. Many confessed to not really understanding what happens in Reception, believing that it was just playing and mopping up bodily fluids! The teachers were genuinely interested in our approach and how we developed the children’s skills. A discussion ensued about how practice in Early Years could be adapted and developed for children in Key Stage Two. Many of our colleagues have chosen to use their Peer Observation time to visit us in Early Years and experience our approach at first hand. I feel this has reaffirmed within the school the value of what we do in Reception.

Sharing our research with colleagues at the Early Years Conference was a daunting experience. I was fearful that other practitioners may feel that everything we were doing was ‘nothing new’ and that I’d be ‘teaching grannies to suck eggs.’ However, the response I received was very positive. As I engaged in conversations, I became more confident about sharing our ideas. Other people liked what we were doing and I was able to engage in mutually respectful exchanges of ideas and experiences.

Throughout the Literacy Project, the strategies which we have put in place have had a huge impact upon our summer-born boy writers. Our End of Year data also reflects the impact that it has had upon our cohort as a whole, showing 68% achieved Expected for writing in 2015-16, compared to 63% in 2014-15. However, although the data for our target children may look a little disappointing on the surface, it does not show the true impact of the Literacy Project and each individual child’s progress. The data does not show the smiling faces of the children as they choose to mark make. It does not show the attitudes of the children who see themselves as writers as they go into Year 1. It does not show the improvement in physical strength as the children can all use the ultimate pencil grip. Above all, it does not show the enthusiasm of the children and their sheer love of writing as they
move forwards in their school careers. As one of our Year One Teachers said when she
received her new class at the end of the first year of the project, “I’ve noticed a big change
in our Year One children and their attitudes to writing….The children enjoy writing and see
themselves as writers.”

Our next challenge as a school is for our boys to maintain that image of themselves as
writers as they progress through the school. How will we continue to develop their love of
writing throughout their time with us and beyond? As Clark highlights in the 2014 National
Literacy Trust’s Annual Survey: 18.3% of Key Stage 4 boys agree with the statement that
writing is cool, compared to 42.2% of Key Stage 2 boys.

My two year journey through the Literacy Project and my time in Early Years has reignited
my passion for teaching. I feel as though I am teaching again rather than following a lesson
plan. The project has allowed me more autonomy and given me time and opportunities to
reflect upon my practice. I find myself constantly responding to the children’s learning, to
be thinking of ways to improve my skills and enhance our provision. I have made a large
emotional investment in each individual’s learning and I feel a huge sense of pride with
every single step of their achievement. When those boys are beaming with pure pride in
their own success I could burst! I have the best job in the world.

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A Work in Progress

By Victoria Fuller

The school in which I currently work is set in a rural location within North Somerset. It is a modern, well-resourced building with seven classes, which means there are around 200 pupils and no mixed year groups. There is a busy, friendly learning community around us and the attainment of pupils is deemed to be above national expectations.

I have been part of the teaching staff here, in both a full time and part time capacity and gaining experience across each year in KS1 and 2, for just over twenty years. During this time I have seen many changes in staffing, location of premises and educational directives. One thing I have noticed, having been lucky enough to teach a broad spectrum of year groups, is that all children, regardless of their age, share a love of having someone read or tell them a story. This was magnified for me in the late nineties when I was asked to assist the Literacy Co-ordinator in staff training for the implementation of the ‘Literacy Hour’. At this time many schools, including mine, ploughed a lot of funding into purchasing quality, mixed genre literature. These were often in ‘Big Book’ format, making it easy for all the children to see both the illustrations and the text, and, despite the somewhat prescriptive pedagogy, it did serve to raise my awareness of the fundamentally important educational value of book talk.

At the start of this project, in September 2015, I had just joined the EYFS team as a four tenths teacher, pairing up with my new job-share partner who had just returned from a year’s maternity leave. Our team comprised of us, two job sharing LSAs and two part time SEN LSA’s who supported two children with more specific needs.

During the Summer, prior to the start of the project, my job share partner and I had chosen to create a variety of learning spaces, each offering tailored resources designed to focus and challenge the children’s thinking and nurture independent explorative play based around the different areas of the Early Years Curriculum, e.g. maths area, literacy area, creation station, book nook, role play and outdoor learning space. Unfortunately for us our classroom was being decorated and we were unable to access it until the very last opportunity, this was not an ideal situation but we did what all teachers do, our best under the circumstances.

Once the class were in we closely monitored the effectiveness of our classroom management. As with every year the cohort presented its own unique challenges and through our observations we very quickly ascertained that the one place we had assumed children would naturally flock to was rarely being accessed.
The ‘Book Nook’ provided a selection of quality texts, comfortable seating, and attractive character cushions all nestled underneath a net canopy. Those who were using this learning space, mainly girls, were treating it more like an extension to the role play area and choosing to play ‘mums and dads’ as opposed to looking at a book.

This was a concern to both myself and the rest of the team as we all share the strong belief that the enjoyment of books at an early age is crucial to fostering a lifelong love of reading and literacy development.

This led us to pose a number of questions including, ‘Are the children used to looking at books at home?’, as a lack of such activity may explain their reticence to browse, ‘What kind of books do the children enjoy?’ and ‘Who reads with them at home?’ but our main priority became, ‘How do we ensure that the children are excited about books enough to want to independently pick one up and actually look at it?’

Our next step was to create a mind map of ideas about how we could further promote reading in the classroom. The whole school was already intending to invest in a significant number of new reading scheme books and so we made efforts to ensure there were enough new and inspiring texts available for the EYFS, as we had previously been lacking in books with decodable words. These were to be sent home and also to be used in weekly Guided Reading sessions.

I also introduced Tuesday afternoon library sessions. We are fortunate enough to have a well-resourced library in school and children go in small groups with an LSA to choose and share fiction, non-fiction and Story Sacks. This has proved particularly useful and rewarding for a number of the children in both year’s focus groups who do not have easy access to books at home.

In order to address our question of ‘What do the children enjoy reading at home?’ and also to get individuals talking about books I developed the idea of the ‘Story Share Bag’. Each day the children take it in turns to take home a special book bag, ours has a large image of *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* on it. This is returned the next day containing one of his/her favourite books. The child explains why they like the book which is read to, and discussed by, the class. This continues to be a very popular and highly anticipated part of the day and highlights the theory that, ‘the texts that children share out of school are significant’ (Dombey, 2015:59).

In order to gather information about the children’s experiences of books and reading at home it made sense to ask the parents to fill in a questionnaire. The children had been asked about their specific experiences but, as any adult who works with young children will know, some of their answers were not wholly reliable.

The forms were dutifully and anonymously completed during a Parent’s Evening, thus generating candid answers and producing the maximum number of responses. Twenty four
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out of twenty nine parents completed the questionnaire. The data revealed a very positive outlook, 100% of the parents claimed that their child enjoyed looking at books, 100% of them also felt that their child enjoyed sharing the library books brought home weekly from school. Most of the parents considered their child, male and female, preferred looking at fictional stories as opposed to other genres and encouragingly there was only one parent who said that they did not enjoy sharing books with their child, (anonymous questionnaires are great for gathering information but regrettably prevent us from offering any assistance to that particular person). Also, rather pleasingly, 99% of our parents stated that they enjoyed reading for pleasure themselves.

Despite this encouraging feedback two issues were highlighted, only eighteen parents provided their child with a bedtime story and ten parents said that they found it difficult to find time to share books. The main reason cited for this being work commitments. A sad indictment of society today.

Having continued to observe the use of the ‘Book Nook’ we chose to alter its location in the room, placing it further from the role play area, and to coincide with the children’s chosen topic of ‘Fairy Tales and Knights and Castles’, we decided to limit the choice texts to ones that shared those particular themes, include favourite stories read in class. We provided clipboards, pencils and paper for children to add the reason why a book might be selected. We also placed baskets of relevant texts near to specific activities both indoors and outdoors.

Upon reflection I realised that this would have been an obvious thing to do when we initially set up the classroom in September, but the lack of access during the holidays due to the decorators being in, combined with an overwhelming amount of inherited tidying and sorting had prevented my job share and myself from dressing the area as we would have liked from the start. Fortunately the new set up was far more popular and not only did it encourage the children to look at books it was also inviting children to develop their writing skills.

With all these measures now in place alongside individualised intervention work the children in our focus group started to achieve steady levels of development.

Over the course of the year our focus on reading turned towards bringing stories to life in order to stimulate and encourage more quality writing opportunities. One example of this was during our Fairy Tale topic when the children re-enacted the story of *The Enormous Turnip*.

‘Reading is an active, creative process’ … ‘props of all kinds, as well as puppets and story bags can also support retelling’ … ‘play provides a vitally important context for young children’s literacy learning.’ (Dombey, 2015:59)
We shared the story together, using volunteers donned with the appropriate props, such as mouse ears, head scarves, tails and a turnip, to act it out as we went along. The children then took this into their play using their language and actions to retell the story in their own words. This experience helped them to take ownership of their subsequent writing bringing both enthusiasm and an increased ability to give meaning to the marks they were making on the page.

As always, just as you start to get the class really into their learning it is time to pass them on. The Year 1 teacher has been very positive about the children’s enthusiasm, enjoyment of literacy and attitude to learning.

As previously stated, each cohort brings with it its own unique challenges, and the current YR are no exception. The EYFS team had a very busy first few weeks putting an initial focus on social skills and phonics. Due to the time we had spent on implementing reading opportunities with the previous class, we were able to ‘hit the ground running’, quickly introducing library sessions, the ‘Story Share Bag’ and a stimulating and inviting book area.

I also persuaded my job share partner to use a book a week, all based around the chosen topic, as a stimulus for many of the week’s activities. This has proved very effective in sustaining the children’s interest in their challenges and keeping enthusiasm levels high. It has also made our planning more fluid, and, in my opinion, more creative.

Once the class were more open to the concept of independent learning, and had gained enough understanding of phonics to enable them to start bringing meaning to their writing, we observed that despite our best efforts to provide stimulating provision for independent writing in the classroom environment the boys in our new focus group were not choosing to access them and therefore were not consolidating or challenging their learning.

Research from the High Achieving White Working Class Boys Project (Pascal et al., 2016:15), reminds us that, ‘physical outdoor activity is often important in young boys’ explorations, developmental capacity and wellbeing.’

As we are currently in the process of updating our Outdoor Learning Area and have a boy heavy class (20 out of 27), armed with that piece of research information, we thought it made sense to explore the possibilities of further developing the provision and opportunity for writing in this space. Our addition of resources is mirrored in the following publication.

‘New resources were added into the areas outside. These included paintbrushes, water and watered down paint, chalk, stones…to mark make on the floor and walls. Having modelled how to use the resources, the practitioners left clipboards and mark making tools at various outdoor locations.’ ‘Outside role play areas were developed, which linked to boys’ interests, for example the ‘builders’ yard with opportunities to take telephone messages and make up orders, write receipts etc., and practitioners modelling these roles and actions.’ (DfES, 2009).
The boys’ fine motor control has since developed considerably and their confidence to put pen to paper and ‘have a go’ has greatly improved.

As a result of the work which has thus far been completed within the timeframe of this project I have been constantly reminded of the importance of closely observing the children within their setting to see what they are actually doing and gaining from the provision on offer. I have learnt that we are very lucky that the majority of the parents take an interest in their child’s literacy skills, not all schools get such support. I have been disheartened to learn that many of these parents are finding child rearing and work difficult to balance, this I know is a far wider issue that reflects the priorities of society today and something I too experience.

By initially focussing on developing our reading area we seamlessly managed to improve upon the teaching and learning of writing too. Reading, writing and speaking and listening are all intertwined and the sharing of books of all genres plays a fundamental role in the development of each of these areas of literacy. When the children are excited about a particular story they approach their learning with more enthusiasm and this in turn delivers better, more meaningful outcomes. It is the responsibility of the adults around them to share, discuss, act out, enjoy and enthuse about books to help promote both positive attitudes and effects on children’s literacy skills and development.

Stemming from the results of our reading questionnaire, I think that one of our next steps may be to find ways to highlight the emotional and educational benefits of sharing a bedtime story with children to our parents. We shall also continue to develop ways of bringing books to life through effective role play.

I would like to believe that the work my team and I have carried out during this project would have been something we would have done anyway. I consider a major part of a teacher’s role is to evaluate, develop and facilitate quality teaching and learning for individuals to the best of our ability and that is why I have entitled this ‘A Work in Progress’, as there will always be something else to improve upon.

References


The long and winding road

By Rachel Edwards

I am a Foundation Stage Teacher at St. Nicholas’ Chantry School, a Church of England, voluntary controlled Primary School that currently caters for 359 children in the town of Clevedon, North Somerset. Our FS unit has 58 children in this year’s cohort (2016/17).

We pride ourselves on our high standards, caring atmosphere and sense of fun in learning in a Christian setting. We want our children to be confident in developing their skills, knowledge and attitudes. We do this through a creative daily curriculum, out of school activities, special events and learning how to learn as well as what to learn. In this way, I believe we give our children a great start and fulfil our school vision of: ‘Guiding children towards learning for life.’

I had been teaching in the Foundation Stage for eleven years at the point that our school was selected by the Local Authority to be part of the action research project because of our low EYFSP 2014/15 data for Literacy. I had got to a point in my career where I didn’t know if I could continue teaching. I absolutely love working with four and five year olds and the fact that every single day is as unique as the children that fill my classroom but I felt that everything I enjoyed and knew was right about teaching in the early years was slowly diminishing and with it my love of the job. There was a massive conflict in values. As an Early Years specialist, I know how vital play is for children but in reality the paperwork, accountability and pressures from leaders meant that the balance had been tipped off the scale. Little did I know that this invitation to be part of the project would be the best thing that could have happened to me!

When I arrived at the first project meeting I felt apprehensive. I had been chosen to be part of a two year project that would entail having to carry out readings, produce a learning log, complete gap tasks and showcase our findings at an Early Years conference (as well as trying to be a full time teacher, a mummy, wife, daughter, sister and a friend). It felt like any hope of achieving a work-life balance had been shattered.

One of our gap task readings contained a quote that really made me rethink the way that I was feeling about the action research project ‘...the way of teaching demands a long journey that does not have any easily identifiable destination...It is a journey that I believe must include a backward step into the self and it is a journey that is its own destination.’ (Tremmel, 1993:456 cited in Leitch and Day, 2000). I definitely needed to make that ‘backward step’ as I felt that my teaching practice and career had become stagnant.
quickly came to realise that this invaluable CPD opportunity with the support of the Network’s facilitator was exactly what I needed in order to fully reflect on and develop my practice and provision as an Early Years teacher.

‘Imaginative and skilful teaching that engages and motivates children does not happen by chance…it relies upon well trained adults.’ (Rose, 2006: 5)

In the year prior to our project starting (2014/15) only 66% of our cohort of 54 children reached the ELG for writing. Writing continued to be the area of Literacy that we achieved the lowest scores in and although this increased to 80% of a cohort of 60 after the first year of our project (2015/16) it is still an area of priority for development (in particular, boys) not only in our FS unit but throughout the school within our school improvement plan. I decided that this would be the focus of my action research.

I have always enjoyed teaching phonics using the ‘Jolly Phonics’ scheme and am always thrilled with the progress that the children make. It excites me to work with children who come into Foundation Stage in September not knowing a single grapheme and its corresponding phoneme and then leave ten months later being able to read and write. The project made me realise and remember that Literacy is not just phonic sessions and learning to read and write, it starts from a very early age and involves each child needing to learn about sounds, words, language, books and stories.

Cooper (2009:24) states that ‘oral language development through play and practice is the true gateway to early literacy’.

Rose in his report, emphasises that ‘far more attention needs to be given, right from the start, to promoting speaking and listening skills to make sure that children build a good stock of words, learn to listen attentively and speak clearly and confidently.’ (Rose, 2006:3)

When we were inspected by Ofsted on May 18th 2016, the impact of the action research project was noted and reported on…’Leaders identified that more needed to be done to improve writing in the early years, in particular to engage boys in writing. This work has been effective. Children’s writing shows a good knowledge and use of phonics. Boys were observed happily writing a number of sentences using the sounds they know.’ Unfortunately this was not enough to prevent us from receiving a ‘Requires Improvement’ rating for our Early Years provision.

Action in Practice

After all of the input, readings, Literacy Project sessions and audits of provision, I was SO excited to start a new academic year (2016/17) fresh and full of new ideas and theories as well as a motivational ‘Requires Improvement’ from Ofsted.
By carrying out reading and writing provision audits throughout our Foundation Stage unit towards the end of the summer term it was very evident that there were three main areas of development:

- Outdoors
- Fine motor skills provision
- Revisiting and planning Phase 1 letters and sounds

Our outdoor area (where a large percentage of our boys choose to play during child initiated planning time) and some of our indoor provisions were uninspiring, dull and lacking everything that was needed to encourage and enthuse the children to mark make, talk, read and have fun. I felt that as provisions had been neglected over time, I had really let the children down by not offering an environment that would ensure that each child could reach their full potential in every area of the curriculum.

During the summer holidays the transformation began. It continued into the first few weeks of term and we still aren’t finished but have made enough changes to have already seen an impact. The children are now keen to mark make and write and their language and communication skills have developed as they describe their ‘creations’ in the ‘kitchen’ and new large sand pit.

The National Strategies document *Gateway to Writing* (DfES, 2009) discusses the concerns about the gap between boys’ and girls’ achievement in writing in all key stages. The gap is consistently wider than that in reading and has persisted over a number of years. Every year within our unit it is apparent that boys appear less interested in writing and by the end of their time in Foundation Stage their attainment is already falling behind that of girls. The author poses the question ‘How can practitioners support boys in the early stages of learning to write?’ (DfES, 2009:1) I knew that if I wanted to enthuse the boys in my class to write then I would need to follow their interests and ensure that the oral and physical skills that they needed to write were also developed and secured. Newkirk & Kittle (2013: no page) cite Graves saying that it is just a case of allowing children to write about things that they are interested in, ‘...all children want to write’. As Smith (1982:33) says...‘all children can write if they can speak it. If they can talk about it, they can write it down’.

Although a ‘Finger Gym’ (with three activities changed weekly) was set up for the children to access during child initiated ‘planning’ time, it was evident following our first week of phonics input and handwriting sessions that many of the children still needed to develop their fine motor control and dexterity. We reviewed our timetable and planned ‘Finger Fun!’ intervention time. The children really enjoyed the different activities and we continued to include these interventions with smaller groups of children identified during our handwriting sessions as needing more fine motor development.
Last year (2015/16), because of national Baseline assessments, (which affected our settling-in routine and our cohort of children) I feel that the important aspects of *Letters and Sounds* (DFES, 2007) and ‘Step One’ phonics (North Somerset Learning Exchange, 2015) were rushed through and not fully embraced.

The purpose of Step One is to develop children’s listening skills, to develop their auditory and visual memory and their ability to sequence. The phase is underpinned by the provision of high quality speaking and listening activities, a rich and varied learning environment and frequent opportunities to engage with a range of stimulating texts.

I feel that we have now fully embedded this in our provision and my understanding and knowledge of this vital stage was developed and refreshed because of our project sessions and readings. (Along with a new love for my old DFES ‘Letters and Sounds’ document from 2007, which I found in my cupboard and dusted off.)

For the start of the academic year 2016/17, ‘Step One’ was planned in great detail using ‘Letters and Sounds’, ensuring that we covered all areas. The texts we read to the children were also planned and a different genre used each day. We have two stories per day planned into our weekly time table now where at the beginning of last year we would just ‘fit in’ a story as and when we could.

One of the stories we read was *Harry and the Robots*. This was a suggestion from one of our boys following on from *Harry and the Bucketful of Dinosaurs*. I discovered that robots were a common interest that a lot of our children shared, particularly the boys, and knew that this would be the perfect time to introduce ‘Metal Mike’! (*Letters and Sounds* P. 38) The children really enjoyed ‘robot talk’ with Mike and he was often accessed independently during child initiated ‘planning’ time by small groups of boys and girls.

The following observations made in Child 3’s Learning Diary, clearly show the progress and journey from oral segmentation to writing:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observation 1 – 5th October 2016</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Child 1, Child 2 and Child 3 sit together designing, drawing, chatting and colouring their own robots following our phonic session with our class robot Metal Mike.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2: “I am making a robot too!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1: “Mine eats number words like nine! n... i... n (Child 1 orally segments the word) nine”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2: “Mine can eat words too like dog! D...o... g.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1: “Mine is going to be called Metal Thumb!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2: “And mine is Metal Silly! I have a penguin from Longleat and his name is Silly”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3: “My robot is going to be Bob...Bo...b. He is a very friendly robot. All of our robots can play together”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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Observation 2 – 7th November 2016

Child 3 chooses to ‘feed’ Metal Mike during child initiated learning time. He picks up each picture card, naming what he sees. He then returns to the first five cards and orally segments the word to match the picture. Child 3 often segments the first two phonemes together and then hears and says the final phoneme. “He (Metal Mike) likes eating the phonemes I say. Cap…Ca…p…cap. It’s a cap!” He orally segments sun, pin, neck, cap and mat.

Observation 3 – 5th December 2016

As Child 3 has now become so confident to orally segment CVC words for Metal Mike, I told him that Metal Mike now wanted to eat the graphemes as well as the phonemes as he was extra hungry! Child 3 embraced this challenge and picked two cards. He segmented the word ‘cap’ and wrote the graphemes he could hear. He asked me what a ‘p’ looked like and then he looked up at our grapheme display…”I know it” Child 3 drew the ‘p’ grapheme shape in the air with his finger and then wrote it to form the word ‘cap’. He then looked at the picture of the ant… “Bug. It’s a bug… I can chop it…b…u….g.” Child 3 is confident to segment the word and then uses our display to help him link the phoneme he hears to the grapheme he needs. He confidently writes the words cap, bug, sun and dog.

Following the children’s interests and allowing and planning playful phonics ensured clear progression was evident and also empowered me as a teacher to feel that I was part way to my ‘destination’. The impact of these changes in provision is also evident in our 2016/17 EYFSP data. Child 3 started school and was assessed at being secure 30-50 months in speaking and was working within 30-50 months as a ‘best fit’ for reading and writing. In February 2017, our mid-point data shows that Child 3 is now secure 40-60 months for speaking, secure 30-50 months for reading and is working within 40-60 months in writing.

We received a North Somerset School Improvement two day review in November 2017 because of our Ofsted findings. Again the impact of the changes made in provision because of the project were recognised and reported back:

‘In the Early Years, spoken language is carefully modelled and as a result children are developing good spoken language skills. They use spoken language to support their learning in all curriculum areas and are accurately self-assessing, clearly articulating the reasons for the assessments they make...Children are enthused by
the new Literacy shed, the outdoor kitchen and the digging area. Children are confident to orally segment and blend and as a result progress in phonics in rapid.’

Conclusion

Ensuring that ‘Reading and Writing float on a sea of talk’ (Palmer and Bayley 2008:25 cite Britton: no date) has raised the children’s outcomes in literacy and has given me back my love of teaching!

The project has definitely built my confidence and a new excitement for Literacy through shared learning and research in our network meeting discussions. I have applied new (and old) thinking, research and strategies to my classroom practice and have shared this with my FS leader and our team. The Literacy provisions in all areas of our unit have improved due to the reading and writing audits carried out as gap tasks. These changes, some as simple as including magazines from the children’s favourite TV programmes in the book corner and sets of ‘writing drawers’ on wheels that include different writing frames and stimulus such as maps, shopping lists etc, have inspired the children to want to read and mark make and write.

The children are keen and enthusiastic to write and read and are the most confident I have ever experienced in my 13 years of teaching. I believe this is due to the oral blending and segmenting skills we focussed on developing at the beginning of the year and ensuring that there is always time to talk and enjoy stories. It feels like the project gave me ‘permission’ to focus on oral work and not have to worry about the pressures from parents asking why their child hadn’t been sent home a reading book four weeks into the start of the school year. It has made me realise the importance of truly embedding the skills needed to read and write in a playful, relaxed and supportive environment.

I have particularly noticed an improvement in the children’s writing skills, where the children have demonstrated their enthusiasm and motivation to write independently and with increased stamina. Their knowledge of reading sight words is clearly coming through in their writing with the children spelling these words correctly rather than phonetically. The children seem more willing to take on an adult initiated writing challenge showing their positive attitude and love of writing.

The impact of the project has also been noticed by the Year 1 teachers. This was commented on after recently moderating the children’s writing throughout the school...“there is a clear improvement in the quality of the writing in the Foundation Stage this year. When talking to the children and FS staff about their writing, the enthusiasm and excitement to write and the children’s knowledge and understanding of how to be a ‘successful writer’ is really apparent and this is shown in the children’s writing.”
The ‘backward step’ that I made in my journey meant that I revisited and changed pedagogy, processes and provision. The changes we have made to our timetable and our provision because of the project has meant that the enthusiasm for Literacy in our unit is more evident than previous years, not just for the children but for our staff too. I feel that I am yet to meet my final ‘destination’ but I am now more confident and am looking forward to continuing to develop professionally and personally in my thinking and my approach to teaching playful and fun phonic and literacy sessions to inspire and excite the children and myself.

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A pivotal journey of enlightenment

By Michelle James

I have been a primary school teacher since 2004. I currently teach in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) at a school with 270 children on role. The school is located in the centre of a seaside town and the proportion of pupils known to be eligible for support through the pupil premium is well above average. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is also above average and there are approximately 18 different languages spoken by children and their families within the school. There are two Reception Year classes containing a cohort of up to 44 children and both classes share joint areas.

At the start of the project I was a supply teacher with many years of experience teaching in lower KS2. I had recently covered a long-term position in EYFS at another school and instantly discovered a passion for teaching within this age group. However, there were times when I felt as though there was more I should be doing to narrow the gaps in development and to overcome the barriers to learning that some of the children faced. I wanted to support the children in achieving their full potential but sometimes I didn’t know where to start first.

Fortunately, my school was invited to take part in a Literacy Network Project, which became the beginning of an exciting journey and an opportunity to reflect on my own pedagogy where I hoped to find meaning to the unanswered questions that bothered me daily. The most important question for me was how I can help these children to develop an interest in Literacy and be at the developmental stage they should be for their age. The two year Literacy Project involved network meetings – 4 times per year - with other teachers in North Somerset and focussed on developing leadership in the EYFS in language and literacy provision.

During the first year of the project I found that many of the cohort showed a limited interest in reading, and that the entry data for reading was below expected for the majority of the boys.

Therefore, during the first two terms of school, I decided to make small changes to our reading provision and aimed to develop our children’s interest in reading. Our reading area was in need of a lift. There were too many books in our book boxes so I took some out and changed the selection of books every half term. I bought magazines and comics which included themes that the children were interested in - dinosaurs, trains, superheroes and
animal books too. We completed a book inventory and ordered new topic books of interest. I displayed topic books in most of our learning areas within the setting and our listening station became more comfortable with the addition of fluffy pillows and beanbags. As the computers and iPads seemed to be a popular choice of interest within the classroom we set them up with stories and story world programmes. As we were starting to make reading more enjoyable at school, it became more apparent that many of our cohort were not reading regularly at home.

I wanted to know how our parents felt about reading and tried to include them in sharing the enjoyment of reading with their child. I created a reading questionnaire and gave it out to all of the parents. Only 16 out of the 42 parent questionnaires sent out were returned and from analysing the data there did seem to be some correlation between how much parents enjoyed reading and how often at home and the quality of children’s reading. Sadly one parent thought reading was a waste of time but strongly agreed that their child enjoyed reading at home. We made changes in how often we changed children’s home reading books to twice weekly and introduced a book of the week. We also included independent reading as one of our early morning activities at the start of each day. Year 5 and 6 paired up with our cohort to read stories for World Book Day and slowly we started to see a change in the children’s interest in reading.

Next, I identified eight children from across the cohort to target in reading and speaking development. Over the course of the academic year 2015/16, those children had extra individual reading sessions, regular small group speaking and listening sessions, daily streamed phonic lessons and a guided reading session throughout the week. The impact was extremely evident and 6 of the 8 target children achieved the Early Learning Goal in speaking, reading and writing at the end of the year. The other 2 target children made good progress especially in speaking.

I secured permanent employment at the school, and after witnessing the positive impact that the changes I had made were making, I started the second year of the project with much enthusiasm and determination to start the new academic year armed with all of the practical ideas and strategies I had learned during the previous year. During the summer holidays we had a blitz in the classroom – throwing out old/broken furniture and toys. My colleague and I swapped our classroom sides of the unit – to make the most of the floor space. Furniture was moved around, cupboards and resources were sorted and the environment is now being utilised in the best possible way including our outside area which was repainted. We also had a change of support staff this year – 5 adults in the unit altogether, which meant that we could plan so much more in our outside area. Our new cohort of 34 in September 2016 comprised of 11 girls and 23 boys, 7 children who had English as an additional language (Greek, Polish, Vietnamese/Slovakia, Chinese, and Portuguese/Spanish) and 8 children that were pupil premium.
During the first week of term, I gave out questionnaires to parents to find out what they thought about reading for enjoyment. Using the knowledge from the previous year’s parental surveys and research reading that highlights that ‘parental attitudes are related to the attitudes and behaviours of children’ (Knowland & Formby, 2016:26), it was clear that parental attitudes to reading had an enormous impact on their child. I also asked them whether they would be interested in a weekly book swap where they could swap their novels or other books they may have with other parents and if they would like to take part in an afternoon reading session with their child in the classroom. I had 32 out of 36 questionnaires returned and the response from parents was much more positive than the previous year. The general outcome was that parents enjoyed reading and this was correlated with how often they are reading at home with their child. Although time was stated as a limitation with many, 30 of the replies stated that they would be very interested in attending a reading session at school, so this was arranged on a Friday and 20 parents came along. As most of the parents said they would like a weekly book swap I had a chat with our school Literacy Coordinator who organised a whole school parent book swap every Friday. A trolley of books was placed in the school hall at the end of the day and parents were able to choose and swap a book to take home. It is still going strong and is as popular as ever.

Our termly visit to the library was booked for November which was another successful way of promoting reading to our children. Over the coming months I continued to improve our reading environment by including a reading ‘den’ area where children could read a story to a soft toy ‘Buddy’ and they could also choose a different library book twice a week to share with an adult at home. We downloaded E-books on to IPads and based our topic themes on story books that related to the interests of our children. We had a story telling session with the author Michael Loader where the children participated in telling a story. I have learned that the more fun and appealing reading is the more enjoyment the children get from it especially the boys!

I trawled educational websites to find inspiring activities to enrich the enabling environment and with having quality reading areas and sensory stations I hoped that an interest in reading and writing would begin. However, despite my best efforts, interest in mark making from the children was slow. I wanted to know how I could encourage more of our children to mark make, especially our boys. I was also worried about the 10 children in the cohort who were using the palmer hand grasp while holding a pencil. Therefore, from my ongoing observations I decided to focus on writing as an area to develop this year. From talking to other teachers in the project, I became more aware of the intrinsic link between pivot and grip and realised how the development of children’s low load control and pivotal dexterity impacted on their ability to achieve the appropriate fine and gross motor skills necessary for mark making. As boys in particular often struggle with gross motor dexterity and development - we have more boys than girls in the cohort this year -
the majority of the activities we put out for our children to access independently aimed to develop and strengthen fine and gross motor skills. I was interested and sad to read

‘Boys are affected most. More than 80,000 boys had fallen behind by the age of five last year; and boys in England are nearly twice as likely as girls to fall behind in early language and communication.’ (Read, 2016:5)

This is very worrying. It became clear through the network sessions that nationally there was a huge gender gap in communication, language and literacy attainment at the end of the EYFS. There was also a gap for children receiving Free School Meals. Clark, writing for the National Literacy Trust, states that ‘boys and pupils eligible for FSM are less likely to reach expected levels than peers’ and ‘writing appears to be most challenging for these groups’ (Clark 2016:3). However, another article by the National Literacy Trust found that:

‘more pupils who receive FSM say that they enjoy writing (49.2% vs. 43.8%) and that they write something that isn’t for school daily (25.7% vs. 19.8%), compared with their non-FSM peers. They also think more positively about writing. For example, 44.6% agree that writing is cool compared with 34.0% of non-FSM pupils’.
(Clarke 2015:8)

After reading this research I decided that the target children for this year would include mostly boys and some of those who were eligible for Free School Meals. I felt compelled to do all I could to change these statistics and endeavour to build firm foundations in literacy for these children.

Further research from Active Healthy Kids (2016), shows that the UK is not doing well on an international level in relation to overall physical activity and sedentary behaviours. This gave me even more of an incentive to attempt to improve the physical development of our children this year, to support their writing skills. The adult lead dough gym sessions every morning in which we focussed on elbow and wrist pivots were quickly proving to show a marked difference. I had been working with a child who found using scissors tricky and also struggled to hold a pencil properly for writing. A colleague recommended using a technique whereby the child holds a marble, bead or other small object in their palm with their ring and little fingers which got them into the habit of tucking these fingers away, thereby strengthening the other finger muscles needed for a successful pincer grip. The children became really proficient in this and by December 2016, eight of the ten children who were using the palmer grip, were now using a tripod grip while mark making. We continued to include pincer grasp and palm arch activities every morning to develop pencil grip and formation. The children especially enjoyed mark making to music and exercising with the ribbons and pompoms in the playground. They also had opportunities to ‘paint’ the shed in our outside area with glittery water and plastic squirt bottles.
The first network meeting of the Literacy Project had involved deepening our understanding of the importance of children being able to articulate what they wanted to communicate to inform writing. Rather challenging for our children with English as an additional language! So, before deciding specifically which children to target this year, my colleague and I introduced daily speaking and listening activities during the first week of our new cohort starting school full time. Our first term topic was Traditional Tales and the hot seating sessions, based on story characters, were a great success. Our boys seemed to especially enjoy ‘acting’ as story characters and the other children in the class were beginning to think of and ask good questions. For example; one of our usually quiet children, who was acting as the Big Bad Wolf character, was asked how he felt when he came down the chimney of the little pig’s house. He replied, “Well, my tail hurt a bit cos I had fire on and had to get it off quick!”

Eventually our children were beginning to think of a purpose for writing and mark making was becoming a popular choice of child initiated activity. As the reading research suggested, boys and those eligible for FSM would benefit the most from extra intervention and coincidentally, the North Somerset EYFS moderation focus for this year is Communication and Language, so out of the 8 target children chosen for this year I also included two of our children with English as an additional language. The target group received extra sessions in speaking and listening activities, in a small group for 15 minutes, twice weekly. An improvement in fine motor skills is evident now. We have a good majority of children working at expected and some who may exceed the ELG in writing.

Our first parent consultation meetings were coming up which gave me an opportunity to inform our target children’s parents of the project and answer any questions they may have had. I also read an article from the Centre for Research in Early Childhood that really struck a chord emotionally. It stated that ‘some parents reported that it was the first time anyone had ever given them positive feedback on their parenting competencies and capacities, which were in all cases outstanding.’ (Pascal and Bertram 2016:7). I think that parents should be praised on their achievements towards their child’s education and development too and during my parent consultations I was pleasantly surprised to find that my positive feedback resulted in building on their self-esteem. It also helped to strengthen home and school relationships.

I feel strongly that I want to make a difference to the lives of all children in my class and have a positive impact on their learning and development. The early years are such a pivotal stage in a child’s life and I want to do all that I can to prevent as many children as possible growing up into disaffected adults, by providing them with the very best start to their education and development. I feel that the Literacy Project is supporting me to do this. Through a process of investigation into enriching child-led provision, the enjoyment of reading, the physical aspects of writing (especially for boys) and parental involvement in
Case Study | Walliscote Primary School

Literacy I have already begun to make a difference and improve children’s outcomes in their early years.

I have grown in confidence and have deepened my understanding in what constitutes effective practice within the early years. I have also learned how to adapt my own teaching methods and techniques and to utilise resources to gain maximum effect in promoting the attainment of literacy. It has been an enlightening experience and something that is now embedded in my practice and will be continually shared and executed within our setting for future years to come.

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Making time to talk

By Hannah Amos

My research has been conducted during a two year project between 2015 and 2017, combining the data of two separate classes. Situated within a two form entry primary school located in North-Somerset on the Bournville Estate, the research focuses on the children based within my Reception class. During the first year of the Literacy Project the class contained 31 children with a near equal gender mix. The second year the class has 29 children with 59% girls and 41% boys. The school has close links with the local community and has a school nursery located on site. The school is located in an area of extreme social deprivation. Latest national results stated our school is in the top 0.5% nationally for deprivation based on IDACI: Index of Multiple Deprivation (Gov, 2015). We currently have over 60% of children receiving Free School Meals and 90% of children scored below expected upon their Baseline assessments. Recent findings in the Read on, Get on campaign (2014:np) reiterate the concerns faced within our school:

“Children living in poverty are less likely to be able to read well at school than their classmates – and this has the potential to be devastating for their future lives.”

Therefore the cycle my children are facing suggests; extreme poverty, low reading levels, low attainment. I felt that my role in making an impact lay significantly in aiding its end by attempting to break this chain through tackling low levels of reading: but how could this be done?

The Literacy Network Project enabled me to explore this question as part of my practice although I was also faced with other compelling challenges of how to achieve this? Whilst establishing myself within the project I also set out on my first year of teaching as a NQT. Initially the task felt overwhelming with the idea of “How can I fit in the project as well?” a question that left me continuously staring at my timetable with trepidation. Despite my initial reservations I began my first term aided with experienced colleagues following the current strategies and practices to develop a clear sense of the settings approach to supporting learning. After we completed our Baseline assessment we were able to reflect on ‘what’s not working’ with a more personal and professional connection. The jump from observations, scaffolding and continuous provision disappeared slightly as we began a more formalised and structured timetable. The original timetable was bursting with adult led and directed tasks accompanied by child-initiated learning in the provision. The question posed by an eager four year old of, “Can I choose my learning now?” after a child...
had completed a number of adult-led jobs left me feeling unsure as to how best our provision was supporting our children’s needs. Their opportunity to explore their own learning and to engage in talk and play with peers and practitioners was not readily available amongst the structured routines.

I was not alone with this concern. Amongst adults in the partner class a child was questioned during an observed lesson: “So what are you doing on this table?” an empty eyed four year old replied “We are waiting for the sand timer to run out so we can go and play.”

The need to restructure and create a positive change was highlighted but again the question of ‘how’ left me feeling uncertain. As a new member of staff to school, and very new to teaching, I knew that the idea of change needed to be approached in small steps. When sharing the project with the team, however, I was interested to discover aspects of the timetable which the whole team liked, disliked and areas they also felt would benefit from change. After voicing my suggestion with fellow colleagues we began the proposal of ‘change’ by ensuring all members of staff felt valued and we ensured everyone’s ideas and thoughts were heard before enforcing such new change.

Providing an environment where each practitioner’s reflections on current practice and suggestions for the future not only provided me with a further insight to their beliefs but also ensured their opinions were valued in the process.

We changed the focus of the day away from adult-directed activities to the provision of higher quality provocation activities for the children to access independently. The new structure also ensured that each adult had a set time to carry out interventions and ‘scaffolding’ was clearly planned as an aspect of each day. This instantly had a positive impact on the children’s opportunity for choice and engagement in higher quality talk and play with their peers. The children continued to explore the provocation that we set up however instead of feeling it was a ‘job’ I began to use ‘I wonder’ questions before the children would explore the activity: “I wonder what is in the tray?”, “I wonder who can create their own ….”. The children loved the concept of the challenge alongside the opportunity to talk and share their work with peers throughout the day. Daily reflections during snack or at the end of the day promoted children’s motivation to engage also. “I noticed …. exploring the maths challenge earlier. Can you explain to your friends what you have been doing?” The children began to take a sense of pride in their achievement and wanted to complete the activities through peer incentive.

Identifying the significantly low levels of language altered our approach and enabled us to redirect the focus of control back to the children. Chadwick & Webster (2010) believe that providing children with time to talk is often missed if practitioners do not carefully and purposely plan to support it. With this I introduced focused weekly ‘Celebrate our learning’ sessions to ensure quality time to talk and share conversation about children’s interests.
I asked the children “What have you enjoyed learning about this week? What would you like to learn about next week?” Both of the aforementioned questions were often followed with a why question to assist the children’s answering. As the process developed however, most children independently extended and began justifying their own statements without the need for adult support. Through repeating the activity consistently and regularly the children have developed a clear understanding of how to respond to the questioning session and know that all children, if they wish, have the opportunity for their voice to be heard. Chadwick and Webster (2010) also believe that observing and getting to know children well can be achieved through talking to children about their learning, helping them to reflect.

The weekly discussions altered the manner in which learning could take place. The cycle demonstrated the importance for providing children with the opportunity to take ownership of their learning as they developed into more autonomous learners which Black et.al (2003) describes as generating pride and engagement in their ideas as they come to life. The interactions between the class and I provided me with a detailed, informal assessment opportunity which transformed into more honest and focused learning. The simple process of critical reflection through dialogue also provided effective informative planning which materialised from children’s hearts. Adhering to the Teacher’s Standards ‘Adapt teaching to respond to the strengths and needs of all pupils’ (DfE 2013:4), I set about planning work appropriate to the children’s holistic and academic needs. This processes ultimately enabled me to plan with language at the forefront of my thinking. It has enabled me to alter my approach to ensure high quality language challenges are embedded daily and it has given scope for this to develop first alongside physical interventions before finally meeting with writing challenges as the end result. The reality, however, of reflecting upon 30 four year old ‘areas of interest’ was an impractical goal but all children have continuously felt valued simply through having the quality time and acknowledgment.

As the learning environment began to change, richer in language and becoming less rigid in structure, my emotions shifted, reducing previous anxiety of ‘fitting the project in’ to now ‘embedding the project into my daily practice’. This shift allowed the project to begin effectively. The ideology of the ripple effect of the children was simple: introduce new strategies for a target group and embed the positive outcome to all. With a startling 75% of children in my cohort beginning school working below age related expectation for speaking I identified this as a primary area of concern. As Britton (1970) advocates that reading and writing float on a sea of talk, my focus reiterates the importance of developing solid foundations. The Early Years Foundation Stage (DfE, 2012) requires children to be able to use their voice to verbally explain and share their understanding in order for assessment to take place. Tickell (2012: 24) discusses how the EYFS Review gives teachers ‘permission’ to decide for themselves how best to support children’s skills in emerging literacy:
Case Study | Windwhistle Primary School

‘Teachers should make individual judgements about children’s readiness for more overt instruction, based on each child’s development, identifying children who need further help with oral language and concentration skills.’ (Tickell 2011: 24)

As the Literacy Project became embedded into my ethos and every day practice the true benefits became evident in the children’s learning and engagement. The challenges faced through altering the school’s previous planning approach were no longer a concern. Entering the second year of the project my professional confidence had grown significantly alongside my personal self-assurance in knowing my decisions were sound. Once I stepped back and reflected with other practitioners, it was evident that their ethos was being reflected through supporting the fundamental principles of teaching. Therefore it was not a question of creating an additional workload but simply enabling more opportunities for the fundamental learning to take place. The class of 2016 entered with language and communication skills that were once again below the national average with only 25% of the cohort entering with age-related expectations in language. Their opportunities to engage in talk and literacy at home were varied and I felt the importance of time to talk to be a vital element we needed to review in our day.

The first year of the project showed significant raising of attainment in the numbers of children achieving GLD from 2015-2016 as shown in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cohort Year</th>
<th>Number of children in cohort at EYFSP</th>
<th>Percentage of children reaching GLD at EYFSP</th>
<th>Percentage of children reaching ELG for Speaking</th>
<th>Percentage of children reaching ELG for Reading</th>
<th>Percentage of children reaching ELG for Writing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2014/2015 Year prior to project</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>53.4%</td>
<td>46.4%</td>
<td>46.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015/2016 First year of project</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>51.6%</td>
<td>64.5%</td>
<td>64.5%</td>
<td>51.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Knowing all children are unique and individual learners who progress at their own rate as stated in the EYFS, (DfE 2012) the evidence supported the positives of the project but left me questioning how can we make more of an impact in 2016-2017? The relationship between the adult, the child and the environment should be considered as a collaborative process. Every Child a Talker (DfCFS, 2008) promotes the need for an inspiring learning environment to enrich language development. The attention to environment should not be just physical but also endeavour to establish an emotionally secure learning space. Jarman (2015) discusses the importance of providing communicative, friendly spaces
where children have time to make informed decisions from observations and reflections of how the environment best supports their learning.

Beginning with our planning we referred back to the children’s ‘Celebration of Learning’ alongside exploring our own observations of interest. Nursery Rhymes were playing a big part in some children’s learning as they acted out songs and rhymes with the puppets however to my surprise during a circle time a significant number of children were unaware of the songs, patterns or rhymes. Cooper (2006) stated that the development of oral language through practice and play enables the true pathway to enhancing early literacy. As I looked at my book corner where Britton’s quote was displayed we decided as practitioners to take a big step. We decided to teach a wonderful 6 weeks of language emersion where oral literacy was completely at the focus of our planning. Through establishing solid daily routines that enabled the ‘writing’ to take place, dough disco, yoga and phonics remained central to enhancing their physical literacies. The weekly topic of Nursery Rhymes focused on the children learning the rhyme, exploring the unfamiliar words, extending the topic knowledge alongside a visitor of the week.

Miss Polly and Doctor Foster provided us with a wonderful week of exploration. Early health and self-help skills, ‘how do you care for a baby?’, discussions about locations asking, “where is Gloucester” alongside multiple questions for our visiting dentist who helped to demonstrated ‘how to brush our teeth’. Stewart (2011) believes that for children to develop their understanding through piecing together information they must be powered with copious why questions to which they and their peers can seek the answers. Browne (2001) believes the capability to question impacts the ability to learn. My teaching allowed children the time to ask questions and find meaning to the words they heard. This enriched their vocabulary, allowing them to become more verbal and reach better outcomes in the EYFS.

One example of this is the astonishing development of a four-year-old Polish girl, who was learning English as an additional language. She began her journey provided with key words which helped her to access her environment confidently. This was supported by using props to tell stories in class. Without this immersion in language I believe she would not have made the progress across all areas of the EYFS that she has.

Throughout this project I have had not only to develop my practice on a professional level but also in a personal manner. As a new member to the school environment alongside a vast variety of school changes throughout Nursery, Reception and Year 1 it has been difficult to reflect on the comparison of impact throughout the two years. What has been evident to see however is the significant impact the focus on a language rich environment has had on the children’s confidence and desire to explore their own voice in the classroom. What has been clearly identified is the significant positive impact creating a
language rich environment has had on the children in my care throughout the last two years, arising from the Literacy Network Project.

The development of children’s language has not only enabled them to communicate more effectively but has had a noticeable impact on their reading and writing. As the children are confident to use their language to explain their understanding they begin by verbally expressing their thoughts before applying this into their writing. For many children the development of clarity in spoken sounds has enabled them to apply sounds through segmenting that they could not have done previously.

The enjoyment of reading through the Reading Reward Scheme has had a considerable impact on the children’s attitude towards reading, providing motivation and ownership of themselves as young readers. The children strive to become a “Black Belt Reader” through reading at home and receive different coloured bands as they reach set targets. Hearing a child in Year 6 say “Wow that is cool, how do I get one of those?” while a 4 year old is praised for reading 100 times at home enabled me to truly see how the power of reading can impact children of all ages. As stated in the Read on Get on Campaign (2014:np) ‘Reading is key to unlocking every child’s full potential and opens up a world of possibilities.’

Moving forward our setting is undergoing a further action research project with Achievement for All. Through this research we are turning our focus to the parents, exploring how we can provide “Time to Talk” with parents whilst raising achievement and aspirations.

The Literacy Network project has refocused my values. My ethos is creating an environment where children feel valued, confident to be heard and to learn through exploring their interests. The project has raised ongoing concerns of how this can disappear as children leave the EYFS and enter the National Curriculum. As recently it is described by Year 1 colleagues “The children lose their ability to be creative, independent and imaginative learners.” The Early Years impacts not only on the foundations of skills they require for education, but also they provide children with the knowledge to become fulfilled and successful adults. (Stewart 2011)

Moving forward the message of Montessori (1907:np) remains at the heart of my practice:

‘Every child can learn. If children are not learning, adults are not listening carefully enough’.
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Learning to let go: a journey into letting the children lead their learning

By Tamsin Hayward

‘Reading and writing float on a sea of talk’ (Britton 1970)

When I was asked to take part in this action research project focussing on Literacy, it came at a time when I had stepped back into the classroom after 14 months of Acting Headship. After analysing the EYFSP data for the previous year, writing was highlighted as an area for focus and development moving forward. At Wraxall CEVA Primary, we always have to take into account that we have small cohorts of a maximum of 15 children per year group, which can skew our data. That said, the focus on writing was an accurate one and I welcomed the opportunity to explore and analyse our Literacy, and particularly our writing provision, with the familiar challenge of engaging boys in writing in the early years.

Early adventures

The effect of someone’s environment is something that has always interested me both at home and professionally. Spending time sat at child level in my classroom and really just thinking solely about the surroundings I offer my children on a daily basis, it struck me that it was very reading bias. Early adjustments were made to the classroom layout to open up more ‘mobile’ use of writing resources, placing items in easier to carry baskets and pots, and latterly a writing chest which can be placed either indoors or outside.

We have lift off!

However, my journey through the project came more through letting the children make the suggestions for subject matter that inspired them, leading their learning and ironically it all started in the book corner.

If you will pardon the pun, we ‘launched’ putting project thinking into practice by focussing upon our ‘Reading Rocket’. Helping us along the way was the very fortuitous and high profile visit to the International Space Station by Captain Tim Peake. The children just wanted to learn about all things space.

With a particularly pro-active group of parents and grandparents coming right alongside the children, our exploration into all things space began.
Apollo 11

Giving the children (and parents) plenty of warning, high quality show and tell based on space saw a model of the Apollo 11, a dip into history about the first lunar landing, rocks that looked like they had come from the moon and a rocket poster from an old newspaper. The engagement of all the children, but in particular, the summer-born boys was significant and listening to them organising their thoughts to communicate with their peers was inspiring.

At this point I do feel that I need to acknowledge that being able to ask such involvement of parents in their child’s learning maybe relatively unique to my setting and cohort of children, as this may not always be the case. Communication was essential in ensuring the parents did not feel under huge amounts of pressure to create master pieces as can sometimes be the culture, which can be intimidating for some.

‘Can we have more information books Mrs Hayward?’

When seeking the views of the children at the beginning of the project, one particular question really struck a chord with me. It came from one of our summer born boys and caused me to reflect. He was absolutely right as our book corner contained significantly more fiction text than non-fiction. I’ve always relied upon scooping up appropriate texts from our library to fit a topic, which of course is fine. During one of our Literacy Project group sessions, consideration was given to matching some of the reading materials that we offer in school, to the material the children access outside of school. I’ve always felt it my role to supply a rich range of quality fiction books, a passion of mine, and far from discarding that view, I’ve learnt to embrace mixing it up and broadening the materials on offer to include magazines and comics.

The expression for a need for more non-fiction text in our provision led well into developing the theme of my thinking for the project, with the children leading their learning, which I look forward to sharing later in my journey.

Constellations

With our class project about space and my involvement in the Literacy Project well underway, the children’s eyes turned to the stars as they created some fabulous constellations using large pieces of black sugar paper and pastels. Not only did this capture the children’s imagination, as they worked to such a scale, but offered the developing writing opportunities so many of the children required.
Aliens Love Underpants Day

A firm favourite in class, as I’m sure is the case in so many settings, was Alien’s Love Underpants by Claire Freedman and Ben Cort. Taking a Power of Reading approach to the book and embracing the extra-terrestrial, the children developed their fine motor skills using dough to shape and mould, twisting pipe cleaners to create colourful, fun looking aliens. Dressing up as aliens in underpants and finding great hiding places around the school certainly added to the occasion.

The children developed a strong understanding of the text and were able to creatively tell the story in their own words, seeing themselves as story tellers.

‘We could sell it Mrs Hayward!’

Children need opportunities to experience writing that is relevant and has a real purpose (Barratt 2014:194 cites Frater 2001).

After being so enthused by the researching of our solar system and how people explore space, one of the boys in class suggested that we write a newspaper. This seemed like a fantastic idea and there was even a suggestion that we should sell it to the parents. What a lovely way to showcase what we have learnt to the whole school community!

Quality discussion was had about the different roles that they could take, for example, reporter, photographer and illustrator, after which the children set to work. The flurry of activity involved two roving Reception reporters interviewing our Headteacher about his favourite space film, one of our summer born boys interviewing another about his knowledge of space and a recount of our day dressed as Aliens who love underpants. The piece of work was completed with a title page and eye catching illustrations.

Celebration of learning

In a celebration of all that the children had learnt, parents and grandparents visited for a class assembly, and were treated to an insight into our solar system as researched by the children.

Renewed confidence and impact

Giving myself the permission to approach teaching and learning generally, (but with a focus upon writing during the time I have been involved in the project) with a much higher emphasis upon child led learning has renewed my confidence and enthusiasm for my Early Years practice.

In addition, by changing my approach the impact on writing was encouraging, with 80% achieving a Good Level of Development in 2015-16, compared with 66.7% in 2014-15.
Within the second year of the project I have embedded that approach, looking always to enhance writing experiences, both indoors and outside.

**My recent thinking**

My most recent thinking is still developing, with careful consideration being given to the difference between the children’s development of comprehension for writing, for example in recounting a story, and the mechanics of getting their ideas down on paper.

**Final thoughts - Learning, work, play, both?**

Playful learning in pre-school is associated with better short and long-term academic, motivational and well-being outcomes by end of primary school (Marcon, 2002).

At the *FUNDamental* North Somerset Early Years Conference, Dr David Whitebread from the University of Cambridge unpicked the attitude towards play whereby children are told they can go and play once they have finished their work, and how in adult life the view that the opposite of play is work, when it is not the case. Following this, during one of our final Literacy Project sessions together, one member of the group shared how they had taken into consideration how play and work were viewed. The teacher shared how she had asked her children about what play and work look like, it really struck me about the view of play there so often is, even within early years settings. I now find myself analysing my approach and ‘teacher speak’.

Am I encouraging high quality playful learning in my setting by the way that I speak? This is where I feel I need to continue with my journey, making my practice and setting a place where play and learning are absolutely the same thing, with there being no question between the two. Will that then truly address the age-old issue that so many early years teachers find themselves addressing, me included, in engaging their youngest, boy writers?

**References**


Threading a string of pearls

Project Conclusion
The Early Years Literacy Network Project grew from the call of the National Literacy Forum (2014) to all educators to take immediate action to reverse the trend of underachievement in literacy in England.

The local authority research project focused on supporting teachers’ professional development in order to enhance children’s outcomes at the end of the EYFS in speaking, reading and writing, through a collaborative professional network and individual small-scale action research.

The research question asked how bringing about change to teachers’ practice in enhancing the enjoyment of speaking, reading and writing could raise children’s progression and outcomes in literacy.

The premise that ‘research is about discovery’ (Rolfe & MacNaughton, 2001:8) underpinned the methodology of the project, drawing on a variety of research techniques to provide an evidence base of knowledge. The evidence showed that not only did the teachers engage deeply with the project, they had influential impact on the outcomes of the children, with the target group of children generally making substantial progress at a fast rate, and achieving outcomes at the end of the EYFS that were much higher than those predicted at the start of their schooling.

The teachers’ own discovery into teaching and learning, theory and practice, has been captured in their autobiographical narrative case studies. Basilio (2017) puts forward that narrative script or writing can be used as a main tool to communicate complex ideas and the process of doing so clarifies thinking. Writing can be said to be a thinking tool. She assert that ‘when you are in charge of part of the process of writing there is a level of chaos but it is fine and good and necessary’ and this has been true of the process for the teachers capturing their learning and also for the facilitator in constructing the research report. The teachers have gained meaning from doing, which is key to being a researcher, by thinking ‘on the job’, the very occupation of being a teacher has evolved the research and shaped their researcher identities (Twiney, 2016).
Nine themes were explored through the literature and network context and evidence was presented in the form of statistical findings and qualitative reflections from the participating teachers and their school colleagues. Most of the teachers were able to complete their reflective case studies as the main source of research evidence.

Whilst each theme can be taken individually, there is a fundamental way of threading them together. In the words of Basilio (2017) ‘fun is more important than you think’, so in a fun and playful way, mirroring the enjoyment of literacy in the project, let’s do some threading!

Each theme can be seen as a valuable pearl of wisdom or ‘pedagogical knowing’ discovered by the teachers in their action research. To increase their collective value, however, they can be threaded together into a string of pearls. The thread that connects them is the power of play.

![Diagram: Pearls of Wisdom threaded through with play](image)

The facilitator believes that the teachers’ ability to reconnect with playfulness themselves was central to them generating more meaningful play opportunities for the children.

The impact of the children’s playful enjoyment of speaking, reading and writing on their significant and sometimes phenomenal progress is hard to measure but radiates out from the case studies and school impact reports confirming that the teachers promoted a love of learning and children’s intellectual curiosity. (DfE, 2012)

Not only was this love of learning evident for the children but for many of the teachers too, and the success of the project can also be measured by this. Through a focus on the ‘flourishing and significance of the person of the pedagogue’ the teachers have changed
themselves and ‘the world they live in...as education is a deeply practical activity’. (Smith, 2012).

The teachers dove deeply for pearls of knowledge through practice, they changed and evolved through that process into researchers, and now carry these skills and thinking forward.

By playfully placing metaphor at the heart of a literacy project (Jarvis, 2017) and in so doing, telling the project research ‘story’, it is hoped that others can find meaning as educators to further their own discovery and exploration to develop their quest. The world is their oyster!

References

Costello, E. (August 1982) Diving for Pearls lyrics from the song Shipbuilding on Punch the Clock Album.


Twinley, B. (7th September 2016) Developing My Research Through the understanding of the other: Doing, Being: Becoming: Belonging Presentation and Discussion at Reflecting on Researcher/Respondent Identities University of Plymouth A/B Symposium Event.
Appendices
## Appendix 1   Methodology Strengths and Limitations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quantitative evidence source</th>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Limitations/ Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On-entry teacher assessment data for aspects of the EYFS: Speaking, Reading and Writing per child in target group</td>
<td>North Somerset Reception class teachers collate this evidence as part of normal practice and send it to the local authority. (Until 2016)</td>
<td>Teachers can have different interpretations of a child’s attainment against the EYFS best fit development statements, however this is ‘moderated’ by the best fit bands with options of working within or secure within each developmental band. In 2016-2017 North Somerset stopped collecting this as a matter of course, but the teachers in the project agreed to continue to send it to the local authority for the purpose of the project’s continuity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End year teacher assessment data for aspects of the EYFS: Speaking, Reading and Writing (EYFS profile data) per child in target group</td>
<td>North Somerset Reception class teachers collate this evidence as part of normal practice and send it to the local authority. Data is verified by the Head Teacher prior to being sent to the local authority. This is then sent to a national data base.</td>
<td>Teacher judgements against an Early Learning Goal statement could be open to interpretation but mitigating this is that North Somerset EYFS teachers are robustly moderated and this is verifies by the Standards and Testing Agency. (STA) This process is overseen by a moderation manager within the local authority.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EYFS profile data Good Level of Development per child in target group</td>
<td>As above</td>
<td>As above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics of the target group cohort across all participating schools for 2015-2016, 2016-2017</td>
<td>Characteristics included whether the child is, for example, identified with special needs, English is spoken as an additional language, in receipt of Pupil Premium funding which aids interpretation of children’s starting points and progress.</td>
<td>Children may not be identified with these characteristics at the start of the school year, and some may remain unidentified within the target group. The identification of special education needs could be open to interpretation depending on school contact and knowledge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparative attainment and progress data over the two years of the project</td>
<td>The on-entry starting points, and end point were consistent, and the progress measure remained the same.</td>
<td>Each year the group of target children was different which means that comparative data whilst useful is not compared between two identical groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School EYFSP data compared to National and North Somerset over several years. (Prior to and during project)</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>The National and local authority benchmarks are useful comparisons to view individual schools data against. This was the launch point for the project.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In smaller schools where numbers are low, one child can significantly skew the data. This data does not show progress, just outcomes as measured by the current educational early years curriculum requirements, which can be subject to change according to government changes and policies.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Teacher confidence and experience questionnaires at start and end of two year project relating to teaching vocabulary</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feedback from another perspective All parents of children in second year of project asked the same questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk of low returns Risk of parental bias Questionnaire was not developed for year 1 of the project and arose from discussions in network so cannot make comparisons over two years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Parent questionnaires in 2016-2017 only</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers may be more honest here as no one else is reading it, so remaining in the private domain could strengthen teacher truths. Teachers can find their own manageability of quantity to write, own style, own methods of recording.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only extracts were shared chosen by teacher so missed opportunities for facilitator to see potential other themes emerging. Kept in the private domain with teacher chosen extracts shared at network meetings so bias is likely.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Teachers and facilitators own professional learning log –</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good for ‘drawing out the detail and complexity of intricate social relationships’ (Roberts-Holmes 2005:47) The case studies felt like the ‘essence’ of the teacher research to the facilitator, using an interpretive stance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time consuming for the teachers Delays for the facilitator trying to ensure teachers met deadlines, including deadlines that changed at the instruction of the Early Years and Childcare Service leader. The case study deadline being brought forward appeared</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Network meeting comments or discussion captured by facilitator, including gap task feedback.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Showcase feedback from North Somerset Early Years Conference through direct colleague engagement with teachers on the day</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School impact feedback responses from variety of staff – teacher, teaching assistants, literacy leader, head teacher, governor - in school leadership and public domain</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix 2  North Somerset progress measure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>On Entry using North Somerset’s developmental bands (working within and secure)</th>
<th>Expected attainment at end of the EYFS Profile</th>
<th>Progress as defined within Ofsted Subsidiary Guidance (September 2013 v3)</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Working Within 30-50 Months</td>
<td>Expected ELG (Secure ELG)</td>
<td>More than Rapid Progress</td>
<td>Outstanding 5 ‘levels’ of developmental band progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Example:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secure 30-50 Months = 1 level Working Within 40-60 Months = 2 levels Secure 40-60 Months = 3 levels Working Within ELG = 4 levels Secure ELG = 5 levels</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secure 30-50 Months</td>
<td>Expected ELG (Secure ELG)</td>
<td>Rapid Progress</td>
<td>Outstanding (4 bands of developmental progress)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working Within 40-60 Months</td>
<td>Expected ELG (Secure ELG)</td>
<td>Steady Progress or also referred as Typical Progress</td>
<td>Need to consider the proportions of children who make steady or better and be prepared to influence inspectors that this should reflect ‘Good’ provision (3 developmental bands of progress)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secure 40-60 Months</td>
<td>Expected ELG (Secure ELG)</td>
<td>Not Enough Progress</td>
<td>Requires Improvement (2 developmental band)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working within the Expected Early Learning Goal</td>
<td>Expected ELG (Secure ELG)</td>
<td>Inadequate Progress</td>
<td>Would reflect inadequate provision with no progress within developmental age bands.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On Entry using North Somerset developmental bands <em>(working within and secure)</em></td>
<td>Exceeding Attainment at the end of the EYFS Profile</td>
<td>Progress as defined within Ofsted Subsidiary Guidance <em>(September 2013 v3)</em></td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working Within 30-50 Months</td>
<td>Exceeding the ELGs <em>(Exceeding Working Within)</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>Better than outstanding <em>(6 developmental bands of progress)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example: Secure 30-50 Months = 1 level</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working Within 40-60 Months = 2 levels</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secure 40-60 Months = 3 levels</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working Within ELG = 4 levels</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secure ELG = 5 levels</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exceeding Working Within = 6 levels</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secure 30-50 Months</td>
<td>Exceeding the ELGs <em>(Exceeding Working Within)</em></td>
<td>More than Rapid Progress</td>
<td>Better than outstanding <em>(5 developmental bands of progress)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working Within 40-60 Months</td>
<td>Exceeding the ELGs</td>
<td>Rapid Progress</td>
<td>Outstanding <em>(4 developmental bands of progress)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secure 40-60 Months</td>
<td>Exceeding the ELGs (Exceeding Working Within)</td>
<td>Steady / Typical Progress</td>
<td>Good (3 developmental progress bands)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected ELGs (Working Within ELG)</td>
<td>Exceeding the ELGs (Exceeding Working Within)</td>
<td>Not Enough Progress (using the EYFS profile)</td>
<td>Requires improvement (2 developmental bands of progress). However, schools will need to make use of internal, over-time progress measures to define progress at an ‘exceeding’ level for example, using Year 1 programmes of study from the new National Curriculum 2014, to summarise attainment and progress for children who work beyond the ELG during the Reception year. <strong>Provision still needs to deepen the experience of the children, reflect the breadth of statutory, play-based requirements and cognitive challenge within the EYFS Framework.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exceeding the ELGs (Exceeding Working Within)</td>
<td>Exceeding the ELGs (Exceeding Working Within)</td>
<td>Inadequate Progress (using ONLY the EYFS profile measures)</td>
<td>Would reflect inadequate provision with no progress within the broad developmental age bands. However, schools will need to make use of internal, over-time progress measures to define progress at an ‘exceeding’ level for example, using Year 1 programmes of study from the new National Curriculum 2014, to summarise attainment and...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On Entry using North Somerset’s developmental age bands (working within and secure)</td>
<td>Emerging Attainment at the end of the EYFS Profile</td>
<td>Progress as defined within Ofsted Subsidiary Guidance (September 2013 v3)</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below 30-50 months</td>
<td>Emerging</td>
<td>This will depend on the child’s starting points and their progress against developmental bands. It is likely that children’s progress will not be uniform across all 17 Aspects or ELG’s.</td>
<td>It is likely a child who starts and remains within the ‘Emerging’ EYFSP band is either young (summer born), may have English as an Additional Language or may have developmental delay, if they are older.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 3  Guidance structure for Case Studies. (Fisk & Loader, 2017)
Parent Questionnaire

Your child’s teacher is involved in a project with North Somerset Early Years Team that is researching the quality learning experiences in Reception that impact on children’s literacy development. As part of the project, we are interested in your child’s experiences at home. We would be very grateful if you could spare a couple of moments to complete the following questions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Your child’s initials:</th>
<th>Is your child Male or Female?</th>
<th>School:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

1) How important is it to you that your child can read and write? (please circle)

Not very important | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | Very important

2) To what extent do you think your child enjoys reading / sharing stories? (please circle)

Doesn’t enjoy | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | Enjoys it enormously

3) To what extent do you enjoy reading for yourself? (please circle)

Don’t enjoy | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | Enjoy it enormously

4) How often does your child see an adult reading at home? (for pleasure or for work) (please circle)

Rarely | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | Everyday

5) How often does your child read / share stories with someone at home? (please circle)

Never | Once per month | Once per fortnight | Once per week | Between 2 to 4 times per week | Daily

6) Since your child started school, do you and your child share books or stories: (please circle)

more often | less often | the same

7) Who regularly shares stories or reads with your child at home? (please circle)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mum</th>
<th>Dad</th>
<th>Grandmother</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grandfather</td>
<td>Brother</td>
<td>Sister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aunt</td>
<td>Uncle</td>
<td>Other: ________________</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thank you very much. Please return this to your child’s teacher.