

Section 1: Details

Title of the Leadership Study:
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Section 2: Description of Leadership Study

Aims and objectives

The overall intention of this Leadership Study is to improve the writing attainment of all children across the school through a programme of embedded and stand alone focus on sentence level objectives. The smaller scale pilot for this approach had been deemed successful, and this report documents the cross – school extension of the strategy.

Methodology

Having identified a general shortfall in the ability of children in my class with regards to their knowledge and understanding of sentence structure, I devised a strategy aimed at addressing this issue. It took the form of a series of short activities focusing on sentence level work, principally looking at vocabulary, sentence connectives and openers and punctuation. Having observed the improvement in the writing of the children in my class as a result of this focus, I enlisted the help of the other staff in the year group to trial the method in all of our classes. We co-ordinated our efforts whereby the children in each class participated in these activities for the first 15 minutes of the school day. The activities were linked to the children's' literacy targets and naturally relevant to their ongoing literacy work. Evaluation and analysis of the outcomes of this pilot revealed that there was significant evidence that it had positively impacted the writing of the children. It was at this point my Head Teacher and I decided there would be value in spreading this practice across the whole school.

The first stage of this dissemination was to run a whole school INSET session where I introduced the method to all teaching staff. I presented the rationale for implementation, as well as the initial findings of our pilot. Along with the other staff in my year group I addressed concerns regarding the logistics of integrating this approach into the existing literacy work. As there would be extra work involved in terms of preparing resources etc, it was important at this session that staffs were convinced of the value and benefits to be had in undertaking this extra work. My year group team of teachers were instrumental in helping me to get this message across. Our collective enthusiasm for the strategy was well received. I also allocated time in the delivery of this session for all teachers to look at some of the resources we had produced. They were encouraged to initiate discussions surrounding development of similar resources at levels appropriate to the phases at which they were teaching. I felt that this part of the introduction was crucial, as if this strategy was to be effectively implemented across the school, teachers would need to take collective and individual ownership. I was keen to set the tone for this from the outset.

The next stage was to support the different year groups in their application of the ideas I had presented; in particular with their development of appropriate resources. This involved liaising with the various year group leaders. It was important to ensure that not only were the resources being developed at the right level, but also that across the school a coherent strategy of progression was being maintained. I also utilised my own team to provide additional guidance and support. I augmented this series of key consultations by facilitating peer observations whereby staff were able to observe my team and myself conducting the sentence focussed sessions. This had to be well co-ordinated involving as it did arranging cover where necessary; though absolutely essential as teachers needed to be able to deliver these sessions with confidence. My team and I continued to provide ongoing support through formal and informal consultations and discussions where necessary.

The final phase (within the timeframe of this study) involved evaluating the impact of deploying this strategy cross-school. I would naturally look at the writing attainment levels of the children and analyse historical data in order to identify any discernible improvement. I also felt it would be important to gather the responses of the children and the teachers involved. To this end, I circulated questionnaires to the children and their teachers affording them the opportunity to express their reactions to the programme. The results of these would form a crucial part of my evaluation of the study. I also felt that if I was seen to be acting on common suggestions from these questionnaires, I could retain the commitment to the programme of the teachers and children, which is fundamental to its continued potency.

Main findings

The discussions with year group leaders, immediately following the initial introductory INSET revealed that there was a definite need for this type of programme. All agreed that the strategy, if effectively deployed, should help to plug a skills gap. The questionnaire responses reinforced this view amongst the teachers, as well as indicating an overwhelming opinion that the programme should be sustained and become an integral part of Literacy delivery.

For the children's part, their responses revealed how much they enjoyed the tasks. The boys in particular responded well to short game activities. Overall, the children managed to express the increased confidence they had gained in getting their ideas down on paper. This was borne out by their teachers who had also noticed a general trend towards more coherent and technically correct expression of creative ideas. In fact in my own class, I particularly noticed that those children whose ideas were always very creative made particularly dramatic improvements in their writing having developed a much more secure understanding of sentence structure.

Teachers also reported that they felt following this strategy gave them a further platform to address identified literacy targets. The frequency of the activities was found to be beneficial. Teachers found that by developing the resources more closely with the literacy material they were able to maximise the overall impact.

Key points for action

The full impact of the strategy on the writing attainment levels of the children across the school needs to be completed. In fact, the strategy overall, needs run at a whole school level for a longer period for evaluation to be truly meaningful. As a result a key action will be to monitor the ongoing delivery of the strategy whilst also refining the processes in place to enable such effective evaluation.

Section 3: Impact Assessment

In my Year group, the Sentence and Punctuation strands of the Literacy assessments have shown a measurable improvement as a result of following these series of activities. At the date of writing this report, analysis of the same assessments across the whole school is not yet complete, but it is hoped it will tell a similar story. Undoubtedly the most significant improvements were witnessed in the children in Year 4. This was to be expected, after all the strategy was in place for a much longer time with these children. The fact that the impact made was greatest with the group who had the longest exposure to the strategy I feel confirms its effectiveness. It also vindicates the decision by all concerned to continue with this strategy. Certainly the co-ordinated approach has impacted greatly on raising the profile of the enjoyment that writing can provide to children across the school. This is evidenced by the near unanimous positive response to the strategy highlighted by the questionnaire responses. Anecdotal evidence from teachers points out the general improvement and variety in the children's writing. Teachers felt that the improvements were not limited just to the areas being focussed on, but actually were to be found across all aspects of the children's writing. Teachers were generally convinced that a proportion of this could definitely be attributed to the initiative I had implemented. I personally have relished the opportunity to adopt a lead role in a whole school initiative and feel I have benefitted greatly from the opportunity to exchange ideas with fellow educational practitioners across the school. I have been able to integrate their ideas and opinions and use them to refine my own delivery.

Section 4: Concluding evaluation of the EAP programme

Overall, I have found being a participant in the EAP programme an invaluable professional development experience. This was the first time I had undertaken such a high profile lead role in a whole school activity. I found the advice and guidance I received during the residential phase extremely empowering in enabling me to roll it out effectively. Specifically for example, I was able to utilise several tips I had received regarding presentation techniques during delivery of my INSET sessions. I also really valued the input I had received from the trainers regarding 'emotional intelligence.' I believe I have been able to lead my year group more effectively and also found the prospect of leading a whole school project far less daunting than I otherwise would have. I felt secure in commanding the respect of my peers and was pleased at how well my ideas were received. It was also very satisfying to have started something which is clearly influencing the development of a wider set of children.

I have found that the EAP programme strikes a very good balance between theoretical guidance and providing opportunity for practical implementation, thereby maximising the opportunity for development. Furthermore, I was able to work on something which was highly appropriate to my professional situation as well as having benefits for myself, the children and the school as a whole. As such, I find the programme to be extremely relevant

and certainly meeting the objectives as set out in my induction. I recently had the opportunity to lead an INSET whereby I presented some aspects of my individual journey as a participant of this programme. Needless to say I was able to present a genuine endorsement for the course and all it stands for. It is certainly one I would recommend time and again.