

“Compelling case” studies

Studies to present the compelling case for all school pupils to have access to ICT and the Internet.

Bedtime stories - Better writing, three times faster.

Writing improves when you practise revising what you have written, to make it better.

Pupils at Broadgreen Primary School, Liverpool, have **improved their creative writing skills three times faster** than is normal. Most pupils in the class improved by 2 or 3 National Curriculum sub levels in just a term, an improvement that would normally take a whole year.

They did this through hard work;

- they made more than **seven times as many revisions of their writing** to improve it, compared to what they usually did.
- they spent **more than 25% more time writing**, because they wanted to.

The two secrets of this success are that each pupil had a netbook computer and the teachers created a highly motivating writing project that made full use of the pupils each having a computer, as well as other approaches.

It's obvious really. Having to copy your story again and again, to make changes to a handwritten story is a chore. Being able to edit your story on a computer brings the joy of being able to make improvements quickly, with the time being spent discussing how it can be improved.

The class of year 5 pupils interviewed pupils in the reception class about the kinds of animals they liked. They then wrote bedtime stories about these animals for the reception pupils.

Reading them to the younger pupils and sharing of stories amongst the class incentivised improvements and revisions.

They published the stories as big books that they could read with the reception pupils, who helped them record suitable noises to add.

Finally they celebrated the stories through an assembly involving parents, with the reception pupils dressing in pyjamas, hot chocolate for all and the yr 5 pupils reading their stories from their notebooks. They also interviewed some of the parents about reading and took pictures with their computers.

There were numerous ways in which the children each having a computer stimulated more and better writing, which would merit being studied;

- using the computer to write made it a more adult task, creating a real 'buzz' of excitement about writing and considerably higher levels of engagement with the task.

- because they could turn to the computer at any time to do a bit more work on their story, and enjoyed doing so more than they would handwriting, the teachers estimate they spent at least 25% more time on their creative writing, often using short time slots when they had finished other work.

- because their writing on the computer was clearer and more legible than their handwriting, they were much more likely to notice things such as missing full stops, so their punctuation became better.

- the computers prompted them to notice when they had spelt things wrong, and they could check spellings with the spell-checker, which many of them used.

- revisions to improve the stories were much easier to make, as they did not have to write the story out again. Even pupils who usually put only low effort into their work made one or two revisions; high effort pupils made several revisions.

- when the yr 5 pupils interviewed the reception pupils, they made notes on the computer of what kinds of stories the younger pupils liked, capturing far more of what was said than they would have captured in hand-written notes.

- the computers made it much easier to publish the stories as big-books to share with the reception pupils, by enabling use of big fonts and in helping the pupils to work out how best to order and paginate their stories.

- finally, showing their parents how they had used the computers to write gave the writing real importance and celebrated the improved writing the computers had helped them achieve.

What is harder to quantify, but observed by the teachers to be a very significant improvement, was the overall excitement in learning, that the project and the use of the computers generated. This has carried forward to their current work (this statement to be further confirmed as there was only brief mention of this in the discussion notes so far).

Evidence and details section.

(information is still being added to this section)

Improved their writing by 2 or 3 sub-levels in just one term.

This is recorded in the teachers' records of pupils' work.

Made 7 times as many revisions of work.

The teachers of the yr 5 class estimate that 15% of the pupils normally put high effort into their work, 65% put in medium effort and 20% normally put in low effort.

They estimate that for handwritten creative writing done without the computers, around 50% of the high effort pupils would normally make one revision of their work to improve it, around 30% of the medium effort pupils would do one revision, but none of the low effort pupils would. Out of the class of 26 pupils this equates to only 7 pupils being voluntarily willing to re-write their work to improve it.

Using the computers the teachers estimate that all the low effort pupils made one or two revisions (say an average of 1.5), the medium effort pupils all made on average 2 revisions, while the high effort pupils made on average 2 or 3 revisions (say an average of 2.5). This equates to a total of 51.5 revisions of writing to improve it across the class of pupils.

From these calculations there was 7.35 times the number of revisions to improve their writing made by the pupils. This is a startling improvement in one of the most important aspect of learning creative writing and shows a very considerably increased desire and willingness to work on how to improve their writing.

Each pupil had a netbook computer.

The netbook computers were acquired in conjunction with the e-Learning Foundation. (more details to be added)

Longer description of the project.

A longer description could be prepared as an article for publication.

Questions this ‘compelling case’ study raises.

Q – To what extent has this increased willingness to write, and to write well, been carried over into pupils’ current work?

Q – How important are the ‘prompting’ features of using the computer, such as making it easier for the pupils to notice punctuation errors and wrong spellings?

Q – Has use of the computers for writing had any impact, positive or negative, on the amount of handwriting the pupils are doing?

Q – The yr 5 pupils had to introduce the reception class pupils to the netbooks and to explain how they were going to use them for writing the stories. This will have caused the yr 5 pupils to think about the advantages of the netbooks for writing and other learning tasks. This will have had some kind of impact on both the yr 5 and the reception class pupils.

Q – The computers aided co-writing, with the yr 5 pupils noting on the computer what the reception pupils wanted in their stories and writing this down with the reception pupils. This will have been helping the reception pupils in that they would be reading what the yr 5s wrote and there may have been discussion of what words to use.

Q – In doing the writing project the pupils have been reading from the computers, which they appear to find more natural than adults find it. Are there some advantages here in aiding reading?

Q – When the children talked to the parents about their writing, what kinds of things did they explain and how might this have helped their appreciation of what they have done in the writing project and what they have achieved?

A note on ‘Compelling Case’ studies: These studies are always ‘works in progress’, being developed as far as the teachers in the school feel is necessary to understand the impact of the teaching/learning approach. The use of ICT is causing very considerable improvements to teaching and learning which could be studied in great depth, given the necessary time and funding for this time. If you would like to discuss and explore this study in more detail please contact (school contact email).

Video clip credits:

The Bedtime Stories Project, Impact; revisions of writing, and Impact; time spent writing, are videos of Anna McDiarmid, Advanced Skills Teacher; ICT changes teaching is a video of Carol Machell, Headteacher, both from Broadgreen Primary School. The interviewer is Roger Broadie.

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