

EASTERSIDE ACADEMY



Case Study

Barrier: Many writing activities are perceived as irrelevant and unimportant.

School Context

Easterside Academy is situated on the outskirts of the town of Middlesbrough in the North East of England and serves a relatively small catchment area comprising mainly of the local estate which is made up of predominately social housing. There is little mobility on and off the estate and many of the families currently at the school have attended for many years.

The school is of average size with 255 pupils on roll, 47 in nursery, and with a recent steady increase of pupil intake; the current Reception class being the largest to date in many years with a cohort of 50. The school is situated in an area of high deprivation with between 50 - 60% of the pupils eligible for Pupil Premium. In some cohorts this is 70%. As a result standards on entry to our Nursery are significantly below average and those expected for their chronological age. On-entry data at Easterside Academy shows children working up to 1 year/18 months below age appropriate expectations in some areas of the curriculum. They have particularly poor communication and language skills and their personal and social development is significantly below age appropriate.

Writing Development

Over the last couple of years Easterside Academy has had a strong focus on engaging pupils, in particular boys in writing. Previous data indicated a gap between that of reading and writing, writing being the lower performing of the two across the school. Feedback from staff shared that pupils lacked the vocabulary, language and experiences in which to write successfully and therefore this was one of the reasons pupils lacked motivated to write. It was often said *'they have nothing to write about'*.

Part of the writing development across the school therefore has been to provide the pupils with those 'real' and 'memorable' experiences and to provide 'hooks' for learning giving the pupils a real sense of purpose and audience for their writing. The school has also had a strong focus on outdoor learning and using the outdoor environment in which to engage pupils across all subjects and create and provide those 'real' experiences whilst promoting language development. This focus also helped to harness other strategies already present in the school such as Pie Corbett's 'Talk for Writing', Drama and Dorothy Heathcote's 'Mantle of the Expert', all of which help to bring the curriculum to life in 'real' contexts and provide lots of talking and oral rehearsal; key factors in successful writing, particularly for boys.



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Pupil Background

Peter's home language is Romanian but both his parents speak good English. He has been at Easterside Academy since he was three years old when he joined the nursery setting. He is in a small 2% minority of EAL pupils at the school. Peter started full time school in reception in September 2015 and is currently in a class of 23 reception pupils. The organisation of the Early Years however means that Peter works within a reception unit where the indoor areas and staff are shared with another reception class of 23 pupils. The outdoor classroom is also shared with the nursery children where all pupils have continuous access throughout the day.

After spending a short period of time in the nursery, Peter's understanding and speech and language were at an age appropriate level. This is above where the majority of the pupils at Easterside Academy start in relation to their communication and language. His vocabulary and language were in many respects more advanced than other children of his age in the setting, as he would often retell stories and experiences using quite advance vocabulary including story language. This was thought to be due to his excellent memory skills and supportive and educated parents. Again this was in many ways different from the majority of the pupils and their parents at Easterside Academy. Whilst this part of Peter's communication was advanced he struggled with listening and attention and was involved in a lot of planned activities to support this.

Observation of Pupil

Practitioners within the Early Years at Easterside Academy have recently created a document to support adults initiating and supporting writing opportunities within the outdoor area, and linked to common interests amongst the children. Peter was working within the outdoor area when I observed him along with an adult who was supporting the play and a group of five other children. They had just listened to the story 'Jack and the Beanstalk' as part of their 'Once Upon a time ...' theme and were in the outside large construction area.

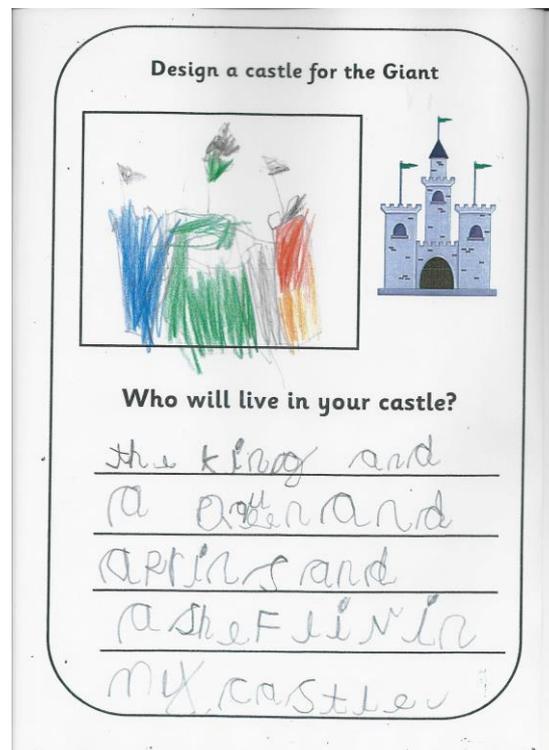
They had decided to build a 'huge' castle and using a writing frame already produced the adult suggested that they draw what their castle would look like and think about who was going to live in it. Peter looked keen to do this and took a clipboard with paper and pencil. All the children in the area also did this and were keen to get down on paper their ideas.

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Observing Peter drawing and writing independently I noticed that he verbally said his ideas before he wrote them down, both to himself but also either to the adult in the area or the children working around him. He showed good phonic knowledge as he sounded out his words aloud and wrote the corresponding letter/s on his paper. He was also observed when writing 'queen' telling the adult that 'q' is always together with a 'u', and that a digraph only makes one sound. There was strong evidence here that phonic teaching was impacting positively on his ability and confidence to write.

Throughout their mark making and planning the adult in the area continued to provide stimulus through questioning and getting the children to share their ideas with each other. Here Peter presented good listening skills towards both his peers and the adult. Throughout the task all the children including Peter were highly engaged and motivated and all saw themselves as writers. Once their plans had finished the children moved straight to the resources to start building their castle together. Peter told me that the castle would have a drawbridge and he began to use the large Edra construction to build one. Later on the children went on to role play the characters within their castle.



Peter is developing good writing skills building on his phonic knowledge and has a positive attitude to writing. His listening and attention skills have improved considerably since he started the Early Years setting and through the school's engaging curriculum, building on popular themes and interests, Peter is highly motivated to write and sees it as having a real purpose.

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Impact / What the data tells us

Following the development of the writing approach outlined in this case study and through observations of the children, and teacher / pupil feedback, it can be said that a substantial improvement has been made in improving the quality of teaching of writing at Easterside Academy. This is evident in both the progress the children have made, and also in their end of phase attainment (2015), where improvement was made in all phases. End of Key

Stage 1 data for writing was in line with the National Average (NA) for the first time and Key Stage 2 data showed that 100% of pupils made 'expected progress' with nearly half the cohort making 'better than expected progress'. Those attaining a Level 4 were above NA and in line at Level 5.

Through my observations I observed motivated and confident young writers who felt they had a real purpose for their writing.

Questions to think about ...

How engaging is the planned writing activity?

What motivates your boys to want to write?

Is the current curriculum providing 'real' and purposeful writing opportunities for the children?

What can your pupils draw upon when writing? What strategies do you have in place to support them to do this effectively?

Are your Early Years staff skilled in initiating writing opportunities within all areas of the setting? And linked to children's interests?