



## **Are Literacy key skills more embedded if children formulate their own success criteria?**

Orchard Primary School, Upper Phase

### **Abstract**

This study aimed to explore whether children had a greater desire to include their success criteria, in their writing, if they had constructed the ideas themselves. In order to trial its effectiveness, a focus groups were selected from Years 4, 5 and 6. These children were all working at the expected standard for their year group, in the hope that the project would support them to work at greater depth- by the end of the research period. Result showed that 20% of the children moved from working at the expected standard, to working at greater depth. However, the levels of pupil engagement and embellishment of skills showed that learners produced work of a higher quality, embedding their formulated elements into their writing independently; whether they remained working at the expected level or if they moved to working above. This impact highlighted the importance of children taking ownership over their writing and how engaging children in the planning process allows for the children to be active learners.

### **Introduction**

The focus of the project is to support children with the potential for greater depth in literacy. This concept aims to further embed children's literacy key skills by allowing them to formulate their own success criteria.

Orchard's recent data review development identified raising '*standards for most able pupils at the end of KS2 in line with new curriculum expectations*'. Generating own success criteria allows children to have greater ownership of their learning, supported by self or peer assessment, to ensure the skills are thoroughly embedded within the lesson.

The intention was that the success criteria would be based on the current gaps in learning and in line with end of year expectations, supported by the class teacher to ensure that the success criteria is specific and relevant to the learning objective.

Royce Sadler (1998), an Australian educationalist, *stated 'we need to let students into the secret, allowing them to become insiders of the assessment process. We need to make provision for them to become members of the guild of people who can make consistently sound judgments and know why those judgments are justifiable.'*

With this in mind, we would see independent, autonomous learners who are able to clearly identify the gaps in their own knowledge and create success criteria to address this. He also stated that *"If success criteria are to be any use to students, then they need to:*

- *be written in language that students are likely to **understand***
- *be **limited in number** so students are not overwhelmed by the scope of the task*
- ***focus on the learning** and not on aspects of behaviour (e.g. paying attention, contributing, meeting deadlines etc.)*
- ***be supported**, where necessary, **by exemplars** or work samples which make their meaning clear.*
- *created, ideally, with **input from students** so that they have greater understanding and ownership.'*

For this action research project, I aimed to ensure that all the above aspects were met, with a particular focus on the input from students allowing them to take ownership of their own learning. This, in turn, supports the other elements as if they are written by the child, for the child they are guaranteed to be in a language they understand. Teachers could then tailor their input to ensure they were supporting the child in meeting their chosen criteria.

Data sources across Upper phase were used to review the research. Four classes participated in the project two did not partake due to NQT/Teach first status, however all 6 classes data sets was cross-referenced. The aim was to analysis whether the children formulating their own success criteria were now working at greater depth as

a result. Samples of books from each class were reviewed to note the impact on an individual basis and the tracking grids showed an overall picture of progress. The project ran for 1 term in total.

## **Research Process**

In order to collect a research sample, five children were selected from each class all who were working at the expected level for their year group. Class teachers were briefed in regards to how to implement the project. This sample of children formulated their own success criteria (three criteria, all beginning 'I can'), in one Literacy lesson per week. Prior to formulating their own success criteria the children were informed of the learning intention and the outcome within that lesson. A discussion between the pupils and the class teacher allowed for a pupil-led conversation regarding what elements were required in that piece of writing. Children were also able to use their EOY writing assessment grids to select appropriate criteria. After choosing their success criteria the teacher continued with their input, encouraging the focus group children to think about their chosen criteria throughout the session and reminding them to include them in their writing as they would be identifying where they had used them in their writing after they had finished. These would then be assessed by the children highlighting their success criteria in three different colour highlighters and then matching the correct colour to find examples of where they have used them in their writing.

Children were interviewed to share their thoughts and opinions regarding how they felt about formulating their own success criteria and what impact it had on their work. A sample of the children's work was collected, pieces of work that were written when the success criteria were provided and writing outcomes when the children had created their own SC. The data of the focus group was analysed to assess the level of progress made.

## **Findings**

The findings of the study showed high levels of pupil engagement. Education Service Australia stated that, *'by referring to the success criteria: students are able to evaluate their progress and the teacher is able to provide feedback which students*

*can act on to improve their performance*'. In instances, effective self-evaluations and teacher assessment has been clearly shown.

Children are able to independently embed their chosen criteria, taking ownership of the lesson. All examples of work highlighted that the children have all used their chosen success criteria- every time. This illustrated that whether they had teacher support, or were working independently they were able to show autonomy, a sense of pride and personal drive to include their chosen aspects. Children interviewed all clearly indicated to the fact they felt like the lesson was 'theirs' as a result of them selecting what aspects they wished to include in their writing.

Interviews carried out with child participants show a clear understanding of how they evaluated their progress. 'You have to find where you have used your success criteria in your writing by highlighting examples in your text. Then you can see if you achieved your goal.' (Child A, Year 6). It is also a clear assessment tool for the teacher as, 'You are able to clearly identify where the child has used their chosen skill and then you can make next steps accordingly.' (Teacher, Year 6). Child B (Year 4) stated that 'It helped me to less forgetful to use these things in my writing.' This highlights the impact that ownership on your own writing has on the outcome. Another child in Year 4 (Child C) claimed that, 'it's more interesting than when I just get given normal success criteria'. This shows the importance of allowing children creativity over what elements and features they wish to include in their writing as it makes it more exciting to them. A pupil in Year 5 (Child D), 'felt like they had a greater responsibility to write a well thought out SC', thus emphasising how as well as allowing for ownership and creativity in their writing it also allows for independence and autonomous learners naturally flourish as a result. While reflecting on their experience Child E said, 'I think it's better as I think children use their own criteria more than the ones given.' When asked to elaborate, he stated that it's because, 'you've made it, it's on your brain and it's relevant.' Child F enjoyed the activity as felt he could, 'take control of his learning and set targets for himself.' It made him eager to challenge himself and add extra information to the lesson. This love for writing is what this project aimed to ignite. The overall feeling highlights: ownership, creative thinking, excitement and enjoyment.

The effectiveness was also measure by the teachers. Teacher A stated that the children, 'pay more attention to them (the success criteria)' when they have formulated them themselves. This attention to detail enables the children to further embed these elements in their writing as they are actively ensuring they are included their chosen features. Teacher A also claimed that they, 'looked forward to identifying and highlighting' their writing- this incentivises them to add their criteria. Teacher B explained that, 'after clearly explaining the process, they were able to identify each success criteria using different colour highlighters. This was really clear then for my teacher assessment.' This highlights not only an instant impact for the children but also an ease of assessment for the teacher. Teacher B also believed that they formulated their success criteria it, 'made them take pride in what they were doing as they had total ownership.' The skills were more evident- when compared to the same SC, but formulated by the teacher (in a different piece of work). The fact that Teacher B claimed that the 'impact was very clear from the start,' shows how easy the concept is to plan and organise within the classroom but also how important autonomy is for our learners. Positive feedback from both staff and children, with positive results is a clear indication of success.

The focus group for this study was for pupils who were working at the expected standard for their year group. In Year 6, 2 out of the 5 chosen focus children are now working at greater depth. In Year 5, 1 out of the 5 children are now working above the expected standard. In Year 4, all children continue to work at the expected standard. This is 20% of the sample that have moved from at expected to above expected level.

Writing levels	Feb-17	Jun-17
Year 4 Child 1	EXS	EXS
Year 4 Child 2	EXS	EXS
Year 4 Child 3	EXS	EXS
Year 4 Child 4	EXS	EXS
Year 4 Child 5	EXS	EXS
Year 5 Child 1	EXS	EXS
Year 5 Child 2	EXS	GDS
Year 5 Child 3	EXS	EXS
Year 5 Child 4	EXS	EXS
Year 5 Child 5	EXS	EXS
Year 6 Child 1	EXS	GDS
Year 6 Child 2	EXS	GDS
Year 6 Child 3	EXS	EXS
Year 6 Child 4	EXS	EXS
Year 6 Child 5	EXS	EXS

  

EXS	Expected standard
GDS	Greater depth

All teachers noticed progress in their writing, in instances where the children have not reached above expected, the impact has allowed for more independent, autonomous writers, but not supported their learning to reach the greater depth threshold. The Year 4 teacher wrote, 'It made the children more aware of using success criteria and aware of what features are in different genres of writing.' This highlights impact, however in order to support the children to reach greater depth more scaffolding is required by the teacher at the formulating stage- within my classroom I was encouraging children to select for challenging elements that you won't necessarily naturally include in their writing. This encouraged them to develop their skills more, but still allowed for ownership and independence once writing. This may be why the impact in Year 6 allowed for children to write above end of year expectations was higher.

### **Impact and Conclusion**

Evidence concludes that enabling children to have ownership over their success criteria allows them to take control of their learning, promotes autonomy and encourages resilience. The Literacy key skills have therefore been more embedded in children's writing, when formulating or choosing these key skills themselves. This active process as allowed children to feel more involved in the writing process.

The set-up of the project and the implementation proved to be a very natural transition. However, next time I would focus on how to further support teachers to scaffold children's learning to create opportunities for greater depth. This could be achieved by encouraging teachers to ask children to choose more challenging SC and clearly ensure each element is modeled, prior to writing.

As the levels of enjoyment and engagement from the children were high through this project, the questions that stemmed from this research focused predominantly towards providing the teachers with higher levels of support to focus on creating not only independent writers, but also more able.

This journey has highlighted the importance of pupil voice and the power of self-choice. It's shown how simple it is to ignite passion into writing as every child participant has been enthralled to be a part of this project and their outcomes reflect their chosen skills.

The research assumptions posited that children having ownership over what to include in their writing would result in these skills being more embellished in their work was supported in this research. The next challenge is to adapt the development around teacher support to ensure teachers are correctly scaffolding the children's learning in order to reach a higher percentage of children working at greater depth.

## References

Sadler, R 1998, *Letting students into the secret: Further steps in making criteria and standards work to improve learning*. Paper presented at the Annual Conference for State Review Panels and District Review Panel Chairs, July 1998.

Education Service Australia- Assessment for Learning website

[http://www.assessmentforlearning.edu.au/professional\\_learning/modules/success\\_criteria\\_and\\_rubrics/success\\_criteria\\_rubrics.html](http://www.assessmentforlearning.edu.au/professional_learning/modules/success_criteria_and_rubrics/success_criteria_rubrics.html)