

How can teachers facilitate independence in writing for pupils with SEND?

Orchard Primary School, LKS2 Phase

Abstract

In recent years there has been a growing recognition of the importance of learner independence, self-regulation and their role in directing their own learning process. According to Quigley, Mujijs and Stringer (2018) metacognition is about the ways learners monitor and purposefully direct their learning. An independent learner is developing metacognitive strategies to monitor or control their cognition. For example, they are able to check if their memorisation technique was accurate or select the most appropriate cognitive strategy for their activity. Elsewhere, the term inter-dependence is used to refer to that learning habit/attitude of balancing self-reliance and sociability (Claxton, Chambers, Powell and Lucas,2011).

Independence or inter-dependence is arguably an important element in the development of a life-long learner in the 21st century. This study explores a range of teaching strategies aimed at supporting pupils with SEND in writing by promoting independence and self-regulation.

Introduction

Orchard School is a vibrant and diverse primary situated in the London Borough of Hackney. Pupils, who range in age from three to eleven, arrive at the school with relatively low starting points. A high proportion of children have English as an additional language and there are a higher-than-average number of children who qualify for free school meals. Despite this, at the end of Key Stage two, children perform significantly better than the national averages in reading, writing and maths.

According to the most recent government data, 12.1% of pupils across the country receive special needs support and 3.3% of pupils have an Educational Healthcare Plan. Further evidence demonstrates that a large percentage of pupils with SEND may also be eligible for free school meals. The number of pupils that receive SEND support at Orchard Primary School is above the national average. More specifically, in KS2, which is the focus of the current study, 24% of pupils are on the SEN register, which is double of the national average.

According to Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), closing the attainment gap between disadvantaged children and their peers is the greatest challenge English schools are facing. Part of the challenge is that the causes of this gap are complex and often lie beyond the school's control. The attainment gap between children with SEND and their peers is twice as big as the gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers (fig. 1). According to recent research, it is thought that the inequalities described above have intensified due to the school closures due to the pandemic, as voiced through a range of charities in the National SENCO workforce survey.

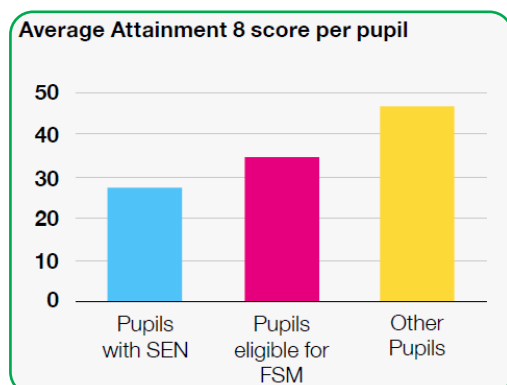


Fig. 1 Attainment gap (EEF 2020)

Quality first teaching is the most important lever schools have to improve outcomes for all pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND, (EEF 2019, EEF 2020, SEND code of conduct 2014).

The latest research from the Education Endowment Foundation suggests five strategies that mainstream schools can implement to improve provision for pupils with SEND. One of the most important aspect of effective provision for pupils with SEND is high quality differentiated and personalised teaching for all as well as creating an inclusive learning environment.

Research suggests that grouping pupils with SEND together can result in segregation from the rest of the class and therefore have a negative impact on developing their independence. In their report, EEF suggests ‘flexible grouping’ as an effective teaching strategy to promote inclusion and good outcomes for all pupils. Pupils can be grouped together flexibly based on Assessment for learning, a particular teaching unit or a common misconception.

Another effective strategy recommended in the report is explicit instruction (EEF, 2020). Explicit instruction refers to a range of teacher-led approaches focused on teacher demonstration followed by guided practice and independent practice. Teacher think-alouds, teacher modelling, share writes are all part of effective explicit instruction and can support pupils with developing their independence and meeting their learning targets. Gibson (2008) says all writers need instruction. Explicit teaching is therefore an important part of ‘*Writing For Pleasure*’ practice. Explicit instruction is also mentioned by Young and Ferguson (2020), who highlight its importance in all writers, ‘...direct instruction from the teacher, planned according to the needs of the class, mostly takes place during mini-lessons and generally focuses on functional grammar study, writing techniques, the writer’s craft, and strategies for managing the different processes, which children are then invited to try out in their writing that day.’ The teacher, therefore, is the instructor who shares a small sample of exemplary writing with the class and then withdraws to allow the young writers to discuss and make decisions on how to apply the instructor’s message. In that way, the teacher is fostering the independent application of taught skills, (Young, Ferguson 2020). Being a write-teacher is crucial for developing writing for pleasure, ‘*teachers are only able to take part in authentic dialogues and conversations about writing if they write themselves.*’ Another important part of high quality teaching is the use of scaffolds. Visual, verbal or written scaffolds provide support for pupils and that is gradually removed as the pupils become increasingly independent.

Research Process

The phase leader led the study with 5 pupils from Year 4. The study group consists of five pupils that have been identified as working below the expected progress. All of them are on the SEND register, two of which have Independent Education Plan targets. Three were eligible for Pupil Premium funding and two identified as English as an additional language.

Further pupil observations revealed that there was an overreliance on adult support and at times lack of motivation for some pupils when adult support was reduced. Using a traffic light system, data was collected to use as a baseline assessment. The work selected was a range of extended writing samples where children worked independently or with limited adult support. These were assessed against the learning intention and success criteria. Red was used to indicate that the learning intention and success criteria were not met, orange demonstrated that the pupils met some of the success criteria and green reflected that their writing met both the learning intention and the success criteria independently. According to the baseline assessment, most pupils found it challenging to meet the learning intention when there was no or limited adult support, see fig. 2.

Pupil	Work sample 1 Cold write	Work sample 2 Setting description	Work sample 3 Diary entry
A	Red	Red	Red
B	Red	Orange	Orange
C	Red	Orange	Red
D	Red	Orange	Red
E	Red	Green	Orange

Fig.2 Baseline assessment RAG rated

As part of the study, flexible grouping was used. This was planned for based on assessment for learning and discussions during teacher team planning. Pupils with SEND regularly changed partners during their writing lessons to ensure that inclusion was promoted and targeted support was provided.

Clear teacher modelling and think alouds were consistently incorporated as part of the teaching input in writing in the form of story mapping, shared writing and visualising to ensure there was explicit instruction during the input, fig. 3. Furthermore, there was a range of visual aids and scaffolds that were used in the beginning of the teaching unit and gradually removed towards the end of the writing unit to ensure independence during end of unit independent writing or 'hot write', fig.4

The slide is divided into two main sections. The left section is a story map with a yellow background. It features several images and text boxes:

- Top left: 'village', 'tribe', 'rainforest' with an image of a village.
- Top middle: 'drought', 'no rain', 'the forest is dying', 'the animals are thirsty', 'the tribe is tired' with an image of a forest.
- Top right: 'Lila' with an image of a girl.
- Middle left: 'tribe', 'celebrate', 'joy' with an image of a group of people.
- Middle middle: 'storm', 'lightning' with an image of a storm.
- Middle right: 'river bank', 'prayer', 'sadness' with an image of a river.
- Bottom: 'What happened in the story?' with a sequence of images showing a drought, a storm, and a celebration. Text boxes include 'rain', 'drought', 'hunger', 'villagers', 'grandad', 'sadness', 'celebrate'.

The right section has a yellow background and contains:

- A cartoon character at the top.
- Words in colored boxes: 'adjective', 'adjective', 'noun'.
- Words: 'round', 'expressive'.
- Blank lines for writing: '_____ , _____'.
- Words in boxes: 'nose', 'hair'.

Fig. 3 Teacher input slide (modelling)

The image shows a progression of writing scaffolds. At the top, there are labels: 'eyes', 'smile', 'hair', 'face'. Below these are handwritten sentences:

- 'He had dark, curly hair.'
- 'He had dark, brown piercing eye.'
- 'He had round, circle face.'
- 'He had light blue and dark black jacket.'
- 'She was kind and brave because he help 66 pugs.'

 To the right, there is a diagram for a sentence: 'The storm was rumbling noisily'. Below it are four boxes: 'The sun', 'was', 'brightly', 'quickly'. Below these boxes is the sentence: 'The sun was brightly (quickly) shining'.

At the bottom, there is a list of 'Powerful verbs':

fly	dance	move
glide	wave	dip
soar	stray	zip
hover	twirl	dash
		spin
		whizz

 Below the list are three images with labels: 'mysterious', 'glacial', 'fluorescent'.

Fig. 4 Writing scaffold progression

Findings

The pupils responded positively to change and enrichment as part of this study. Through pupil observations and interviews, pupils were becoming increasingly confident and motivated in writing, which had a positive impact on their independence. One pupil stated that the use of visuals ‘... helped me understand the words and then use them in my writing’. Another pupil identified ‘when I get stuck I look at your example on the board to help me. I am more independent’. Similarly to the baseline assessment, end point data was collected using the traffic light system that demonstrated the extent to which the pupils in question met their target whilst working independently.

As can be seen in fig. 5, pupils’ attainment in writing, whilst working independently, increased over time. It became evident that once all the elements of high quality teaching were embedded, pupils’ independence and self-regulation was secure and that had a positive impact on their attainment. Through pupil observations, it was clear that the pupils were more confident with selecting and utilising their scaffolds independently as well as articulating their understanding during pupil voice.

	Work samples assessed across research timeframe												
Pupil	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
A	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Grey	Red	Green	Green	Green	Yellow	Green	Yellow	Grey	Grey
B	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Green	Yellow	Green	Yellow	Green	Yellow	Green	Green
C	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Grey	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
D	Yellow	Green	Yellow	Green	Red	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
E	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Green	Yellow	Green	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Green

Fig. 5 Work Samples assessed across research timeframe

Impact and Conclusion

This study concludes that flexible grouping, explicit instruction and purposeful scaffolds can increase pupils’ with SEND independence and result in improvement in outcomes. All things considered, pupils became increasingly confident in using new vocabulary, spelling challenging words and writing in sentences that are grammatically accurate and rich in content. Teachers became more confident in planning high quality differentiated and personalised lessons in writing that were rich in scaffolds and clear in instruction. It is worth mentioning that this research was interrupted by school closures during the months of January to March. Hence, teaching and learning during this time was conducted remotely, without the quality first adult support that children would have if they were attending school in person.

The overriding message from this study is that teachers should prioritise familiar but powerful strategies, like scaffolding and explicit instruction, to support their pupils with SEND. This requires teachers to understand the needs of individual pupils and embed specific approaches into their everyday, classroom practise, where inclusion is an integral part of their teaching and not an add-on task.

References

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