Pupil Voice for Promoting Inclusion in Schools (PVPI)

Increasing children's willingness to write: An account of practice from collaborative action research in Wordsworth Primary School

University of Southampton

The project

The project **(funded by Research England – Participatory Research Fund, UKRI)** addresses the question: **"How can we promote inclusion in schools through an engagement with pupils' voices?"** It involved a group of primary schools in the city of Southampton that carried out collaborative action research, to find ways that will ensure that all children's voices are heard in order to promote greater inclusion in learning processes. The study employed participatory research methods. Each school developed their own research focus based on an area of concern for them, or an area that they wanted to explore in more detail, through the lens of pupil voice.

The school

Wordsworth primary school is a large three-form entry primary school of 648 pupils aged between 4 and 11 and 99 members of staff, re-built in 2013 in the Shirley area of West Southampton. 49 % of pupils speak English as an Additional Language (EAL), 35 % are in receipt of Pupil Premium (PP) and the school has higher than average number of pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). The school is amongst the 5 % of the most deprived areas in the country.

The school's vision is summed up in the following statements:

> We will build a school where everyone unites. We will build a community empowered to make a difference for generations to come. Together we will build a future beyond our imagination.

The school focuses on five values: learning; trust; empowerment; nurture; community.The school staff have high aspirations for children and are passionate about ensuring that all pupils receive a relevant, broad and balanced curriculum through high quality inclusive teaching.

Research focus and process

Three teachers took part in the first workshop which was organised at the university: The Early Years (EY) Lead, the Maths Lead and one of the Year 6 teachers in the school. During the workshop, the purposes of the project were discussed and the use of various participatory methods to involve children in research in schools were explored.

Having teachers from different year groups and with different expertise and roles within the school, meant that different focuses were developed for each year group.

The EY Lead chose to focus on exploring ways of increasing children's willingness of writing through pupil voice approaches in the reception classes - Year R (4-5 years olds) and developed the following research question:

- **How can we increase the willingness of children in writing through pupil voice approaches?**

The Maths Lead decided to use participatory methods in one class in Year 4 where he had teaching tasks, to explore how to support children use appropriate vocabulary about maths. At the same time, similar methods were used with a year 5 class focusing on

exploring what helps children's understanding when reading something new.

For this Account of Practice, we are focusing on the Reception Class example to describe the overall process. All three Reception class teachers and Teaching Assistants participated, with the guidance and support of the EY Lead. What the EY Lead did was to focus on both the skills that children need for writing, whilst at the same time explore what would potentially increase their willingness to write.

In doing this, they gave children the opportunity to talk about what they want to write about, as well as talk about what they want to use to write. The Pupil Voice Research Plan in the reception classes involved the following steps:

Step One: Taking Photos – Some small groups of children were given iPads to take photographs of things that they could use to support their writing - inside and outside the classroom. All three classes participated and photos taken were stored on Tapestry (an online journal to help record children's learning in early years). Teachers intended to facilitate all children having a turn in the future with taking photos. Some of these photos were then used in Step 3 on a different day.

Step Two: Diamond 4 Task – Children in small groups were given 4 statements about writing, accompanied by related pictures, and were asked to rank them demonstrating what was more important for them.


Using diamond 4 task

The statements were:

- My writing should be about something I like
- I have things that help me write
- I can use what I want to write with
- My writing has a picture with it

This task was completed in small groups, with the support of an adult (the class teacher or teaching

assistant). In one group, students were asked to show thumbs up or thumbs down to represent "what I can use to write with/it is important to you" or "what I won't use to write with/it is not important to you". The teacher also asked students to give the reason why they think so.

Step Three: Group discussion and poster production – The next day, a whole class discussion focusing on 'What would you like to write about?' was carried out. During this step children were asked to think and discuss with their partners what they would like to write about and encouraged to think about what they are enjoying/what they have been learning and what they could write about starting the following week. Their ideas were added on a mind map/poster for all to see. This gave teachers the opportunity to look at the 'will' aspect, that they were focusing on.
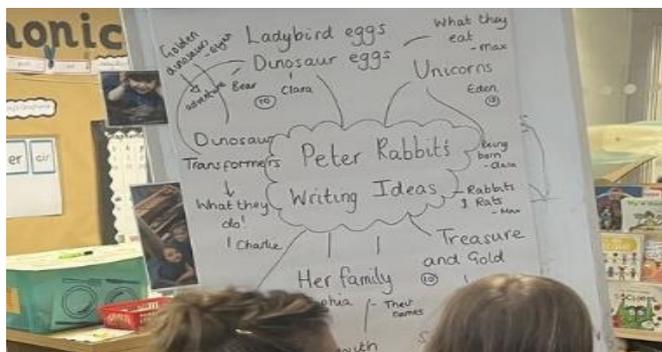
Using posters to collect students' writing ideas

Step Four: Teachers' Teaching Plan – The reception class teachers met and looked and analysed the posters created in each of the classes and summarised the most popular topics of all three classes, like 'family', 'animals', and 'dinosaur eggs', which were then incorporated into both guided and independent writing work.

Participatory methods used

A range of participatory methods were used in this school, in the different classes (Reception Class, Year 4 and Year 5 Classes).

Visual images: In the Reception class, children were asked to take pictures with ipads, showing what supports them with writing, inside and outside the classroom.

In Year 4, iPads were also used during a whole class lesson, to collect students' ideas of maths learning. The key question was "What things in the classroom help you show your understanding and use important vocabulary in maths?" The teacher showed students how to use the camera and they were then asked to

work in pairs, taking photos of the three top items in the class that they find are really helpful for maths learning within five minutes. The teacher also gave some suggestions, like the working wall, that included some maths materials and encouraged children to look around and discuss and identify what helps them before taking pictures.

The teacher gathered all pictures taken and then looked at those and ranked the pictures that were taken most times and identified that the following were the most popular: Maths displays in the classroom; Mini-Whiteboard; Place Value Counters; Teaching Assistant and Base-10.

Year 4 Students using iPad to take photos

Diamond 4 Task: This was a modification of the well established Diamond 9 method that the Reception Classes used, as described above. The teachers had only 4 statements, since these were very young children. They also included pictures to support children's understanding.

Posters: Teachers in the Reception Classes, as described above, used posters to collect students' writing ideas, during a whole class discussion. To ensure that all children's ideas were included, the whole class was divided into two mixed groups. One group (containing 10 children) was led by one teaching assistant outside the classroom, whereas the rest of the class (18 children) stayed in class with the teacher. Some of the children in the group that worked with the teacher, even after being sat on the carpet for a long time, when they were told they could go out and play they stayed behind. These children waited in a queue to make sure that they talked to the teacher individually and that all their ideas were added on the poster, despite having already offered some ideas during the group discussion. In the end, the posters represented a diverse range of ideas.

Outcomes

One of the learning goals by the end of the Reception year was to be able to write a sentence that can be read by others and by children themselves. Through this project, the teachers decided to focus on children's interests in order to increase their willingness to write, to help with achieving this goal.

Talking with the teachers at the end of the process, it was impressive to see that the most reluctant writers in these classes, have started to show their willingness to write about the topics that interest them, like 'family and home' and 'buddies'. Some of them could do it themselves, and some of them could do it with the help of the Class Teacher or Teaching Assistant. The examples below show two particular children who chose to draw pictures to facilitate themselves to complete their writing task.
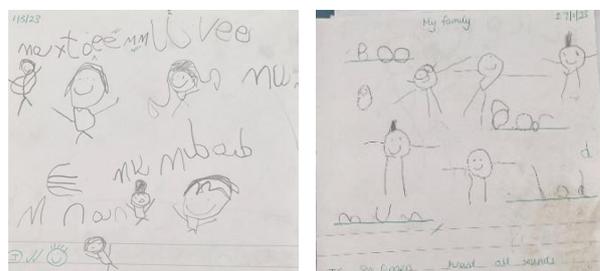
Children's drawings that helped with their writing tasks

Furthermore, many of the children's ideas that were surfaced through this project, have been embedded into teachers' planning, such as including a wide range of children's interests for writing tasks. At the same time, increased opportunities for children's writing were also given.

Poster of writing interests from a reception class

Key ideas emerging

Variety of participatory methods: The use of the various participatory methods allowed children to express their views through a range of means. They also enabled teachers to look at various dimensions of what would help children with their writing and what would help children in Maths.

Employing participatory methods in small groups: Having children working in small groups with adults is helpful. This allows focusing on individual students' suggestions and exploring with them in more detail what they want to say. This was particularly important for the very young children that took part in the project in this school.

Benefits to individual teachers despite changes of roles: Due to changes in roles of class teachers during the school year, it was not possible to progress with some of the ideas explored in the Year 4 class. However, the teacher has reflected on some of the ideas that the students expressed through the pictures that they took in that class and will be revisiting some of these ideas in new classes.

Teachers working in teams: The three teachers in the reception classes worked as a team and this allowed them to have in depth discussions about what was emerging in each of the classes through the use of the same participatory methods. More importantly, this allowed teachers to include in their planning students' ideas that then allowed children to be more engaged in the writing process, including some of the most reluctant writers in the class. Having one committed teacher leading the whole process was also important.

Ensuring children's diverse interests are included in lessons in some way: Engaging with pupil's voice was a good way to increase children's willingness to write. However, sometimes it was difficult to incorporate every child's interest in the planning of lessons. For example, in one of the classes there was a boy who was obsessed with washing machines. Through the project process the teachers got to know children even better than before, since he brought it up during the activities of this project. The teacher took this opportunity and asked him to write about his specific interest.

Teachers' thoughts

EY Lead

> I like the idea of listening to pupils' voices. It is quite different from teacher-directed activities that we used to do in the past.

> It's good for them to know that they have some ownership and investment over it and they're not just doing what the adult tells them.

Reception Class Teacher

> I was feeling like they're in charge. So when you hand them that iPad and say you're in charge of taking photos. They suddenly pop themselves up.

EY Lead

Maths Lead

> There's all the little things that we can put out in the environment that then they can be inspired by and choose to do.

Teacher team

- Clare Workman (Early Years Lead)
- Hugh Jenkinson (Maths Lead)
- James Beazley (English Lead)
- Emma Harvey (Reception Class Teacher)
- Amy Stevenson (Reception Class Teacher)
- Catherine Lewis(Year 5 Teacher)

Headteacher: Julie-Anne Palfrey

Research team

- Professor Kiki Messiou
- Dr Jay de los Reyes
- Chinmaya Potnis
- Ping Dong
- Dr Vivienne Rwang

We would also like to acknowledge the contribution of many children and other staff in the school who have contributed to this work in various ways.