



‘Improve pupil progress and attainment and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of teaching, by supporting the development of behaviours for learning in pupils through the use of positive teacher language’

This case study is a summary of an initiative that I implemented in a school that was, and to an extent still is, facing many challenges. I am a Secondary School faculty lead in a community ranked in the 10% most deprived nationally. In the last three inspections the school was graded ‘Requires Improvement’ by Ofsted.

A finding in the most recent Ofsted report on the school highlighted deficits in literacy standards. I began to research and develop my initiative around how language (as one of a range of oral literacy strategies) can be used to address such deficits, inspire and challenge, and foster positive staff-student relationships. I researched different approaches to this, examining case studies from other schools, reading articles and papers, and gaining the views of staff and students from my own school.

Outcomes were varied, but there were also common principles and processes, particularly the concept that everything comes back to the classroom and to teacher-student relationships. As a result, together with analysis of existing data relating to the ‘literacy deficit’, the initiative focus became clearer. The way I could demonstrate an impact on students’ literacy was to consider how staff could model suitable oral literacy and use this to develop the teacher-student relationship. Subsequently the project developed further to consider how such strategies might also have a positive impact on student behaviour as well as achievement. I was confident in these developments being valid and appropriate, particularly after considering the five level model on Value for Money (Guskey 2005). I reflected on ‘what am I asking’, ‘how am I asking’, ‘what am I measuring and how does this help?’

There were initial difficulties in identifying quantifiable data for assessing impact on student outcomes but I was confident in the validity of the initiative as part of a multi-faceted strategy. Discussion with my in-school coach helped to address this as we identified ways that we could employ meaningful data to monitor impact. Using staff and student surveys, analysis of behaviour trends alongside analysis of Average Points Score (APS) trends, and behaviour for learning data, I was able to demonstrate impact.

Initial data analysis showed evidence of progress in almost all subjects, but this progress was relatively slow. It seemed to demonstrate a sense perhaps of ‘passive compliance’ and possibly low staff expectations. This provided me with some justification for developing the focus of the project further; as well as addressing the literacy elements I wanted to consider how my initiative might also address motivation, mind-set and challenge as part of the wider school focus on Behaviours for Learning.

Key questions and points were raised through surveys, including:

- Are students being actively challenged?
- Do student / staff relationships exist that encourage a growth mind-set and consequently, progress in attainment?
- How are staff using vocabulary to inspire and motivate, and to build positive relationships? To what extent should teachers adopt a more ‘colloquial’ vocabulary in order to clarify understanding as well as to build relationships? Is this an appropriate strategy or should staff always adopt a more ‘formal’ vocabulary?

With regards to the impact the programme had on me as a leader, I took inspiration from Fullan (2010), *'Top down change doesn't work'*. I adopted a shared, peer-driven approach. I worked with others to discuss ways forward and made them value being part of the strategy, and found that 'Working in Collaboration' was the fundamental area in which I developed. I worked closely with a number of key staff to see how my initiative could form part of a wider approach to developing standards of literacy, oracy, academic progress and promote positive Behaviour for Learning. This proved beneficial, as I was able to consult with staff, share and draw from their findings and ensure that there were common goals identified with regards to our strategies.

I also learned, crucially, that as a leader you need to be prepared to change direction in your strategic thinking if you feel this is necessary. Initially my project focus was narrow and it was difficult to evidence impact. I found that undertaking the Options Appraisal helped significantly in identifying and justifying the approach I should take. I realised that changing direction slightly in terms of collaboration and focus was needed, as was looking in different places for relevant data. I was also reminded throughout of how important and valuable sharing good practice is. Perhaps sometimes it may seem that we try to keep control of our own initiatives within our own little 'bubble', but this project demonstrated quite clearly the importance of collaboration.

I was able to identify a number of strategies that could have potential impact on pupil progress that are outlined in the following diagrams showing the project structure and how the different strands inter-related.

Structure of Improvement Project

IDENTIFY PROJECT / INFORMATION GATHERING

Director of Literacy, Staff, Students, Behaviour for Learning Records, Average Points
Tracking for target cohort

RESEARCH KEY ISSUES

What is being done elsewhere to address literacy deficits? What research is there to support this initiative – looking for links between language use and oral literacy alongside improving BfL. Other relevant research as found.

ACTIONS

- Develop a programme of CPD for staff both within the faculty and the whole-school staff body, tailored to the development of oral literacy, increasing student motivation, encouraging progress and developing positive relationships (BfL). Identify and apply these strategies initially within own faculty, and use outcomes to shape the whole-school CPD programme further.
- Work with other staff leading similar initiatives to address BfL and oral literacy to form a supportive partnership and to help define the development of my initiative alongside theirs through implementing strategies at faculty level.
- Identify one focus group of students (whole-school) and track their academic progress alongside progress in Behaviour for Learning aptitudes

REFLECTION

- Review development of CPD programme (faculty and whole-school)
 - Review data (BfL)
 - Review data (Target group – attainment)
- Evaluate effectiveness of collaboration – is there any duplication of strategy?
 - Learning walks / observations
 - Evaluate the quality

REACTION

- Respond to issues identified in REFLECTION.
- Re-shape the CPD programme as required – adding training / research to suit the identified need and tailoring more to the whole-school context, further developing the broader curriculum as a result.

EVALUATE / NEXT STEPS

Consider how the outcomes of CPD, the re-visiting of how to strengthen teacher – student relationships, the importance of modelling good practice in oral literacy and the impact of these strategies on progress, attainment and motivation become successfully embedded in practice, and sustained.

Initiative Model – how the different strands and approaches inter-relate.



At the end of the project there were tangible improvements in Behaviour for Learning (evidenced through periodic data analysis directly provided by class teachers), an increased awareness of the importance of staff-teacher relationships as part of this, and in particular, a focus on how oral-literacy and positive vocabulary supported the overall aim. I developed a CPD programme to support staff in considering these initiatives and strategies, focusing on themes such as: 'Building confidence and esteem through the language we use'; 'Using spoken-word games and exercises to extend vocabulary'; 'Curriculum-focused dialogue and interaction (EEF)'; 'An introduction to NLP (Neuro-Linguistic Programming)'; 'How can the language I use lead to positive outcomes in motivating students, in improving student literacy and in conflict situations?'; 'How to effectively evidence progress through student dialogue'; and 'Same words, different tone'

In conclusion, this initiative gave significant insight into the different challenges presented by leadership. I was able to demonstrate a link between oral literacy expectations and progress through this being one strand of a collaborative Behaviour for Learning process. There were points where I needed to reflect and consider, evaluate and justify, monitor and change. Overall impact was demonstrated through survey responses, learning walks, discussion with staff and in discussions with students.