

Case study 12: Ethnic Minority Achievement

Developing writing in Year 6 through
incorporating and celebrating Gypsy,
Roma and Traveller lifestyle and cultures



Introduction

This case study shows how a school used Assessment for Learning (AfL) and Assessing Pupils' Progress (APP) as tools to embed Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) cultures into the curriculum, improving pupils' standards in writing. The work played to the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils' strengths by using talk as a stimulus for writing.

Background

This new primary school was established in 2004 and has just over 300 children on roll. It is situated in the North of England. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is above average, as is the proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds, with those from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller and Asian heritage backgrounds being the next largest groups. The school draws its pupils from a wide socio-economic area with some significant deprivation. Pupils' abilities and skills on entry are wide and vary from year to year.

The school recognised that there was a need to promote respect and understanding for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils' lifestyles; although some whole-school initiatives had taken place, this needed to be developed further and embedded in the curriculum, through the medium of writing, using Traveller culture as a context. In addition:

- teacher assessments had identified the need to raise writing standards of all pupils, including Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils, in Year 6;
- staff wanted to develop talk as a stimulus for writing, thereby using the strengths of the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils;
- there was a desire to model writing for pupils by offering teacher-written stories as a stimulus;
- AfL and APP were identified as tools that could particularly improve the literacy of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils.

Approach

All actions were taken in line with whole-school targets to raise writing standards of every pupil via AfL, using APP.

Lead and team teaching were used, one morning a week for three terms. The lead teacher initially assessed an unaided piece of writing, using APP guidelines sheets that were then shared with the pupils and their class teachers. Over the first two terms, the aims were to develop the four basic skills of using ambitious vocabulary, connectives, varied sentence-openers and a variety of punctuation. Work was assessed both on a day-to-day basis using AfL, where each lesson identified good practice and worked on areas to be improved, and periodically, at the end of each term using APP.

Teaching then moved on to develop and consolidate an internal understanding of the basic pattern for a story: opening, build-up, dilemma, resolution and end. The Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils were particularly responsive to talk for writing at this stage, clearly and carefully structuring writing, orally first. Stories were then planned from a Traveller perspective, for example based on living in a trailer, using cultural names for families and positive Gypsy identities within stories. To encourage peer-assessment, positive characterisation and the development of the school's own bank of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller resources, the teacher wrote a story for the class, called 'The Rescue' and featuring one of the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils. This modelled all the aspects of literacy that were being targeted in class.

The third term focused on higher-order writing skills, breaking away from formalised story structure to a more creative and independent approach.

The final assessment each term was based on an independent piece of work.

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Outcome

The school felt that the work has had a more wide-reaching impact than they had envisaged, with:

- greater awareness by pupils and staff of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller lifestyles;
- positive identities of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities used in literature;
- positive attitudes to writing;
- clearer focus on shared and understood learning targets;
- raised standards in writing, with all Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils being assessed within level 4.

The recent school Ofsted report identified that:

It is not only the high standards reached in 2008 which are impressive. Equally so is the exceptional progress pupils...from Gypsy Roma traveller backgrounds make in their learning. This, again, is because of outstanding levels of care, guidance and support provided.

Ofsted, March 2009

Future plans

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller achievement will remain a focus for the school. Staff will continue to work on improving writing using AfL and APP to embed the work carried out so far.

Audience: Strategy and EMA managers and consultants, headteachers, primary and secondary school senior leaders and teachers

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