

An Examination into the Effectiveness of Different Reading Strategies at Key Stage 3

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> Aim

To investigate the teaching of reading in a secondary school by changing the practice of daily silent reading to paired support reading.

> Dimensions of this Case Study

Two Year 7 mixed ability tutor groups were used in this study, there were 22 pupils in the intervention group and 20 pupils in the control group. The 4 pupils from each tutor group who were on the Special Needs register did not take part in this study.

> Summary of Findings for this Case Study

- There was evidence of greater improvement in reading in the intervention group than in the control group, as measured by NFER-Nelson Group Reading Test II.
- Pupils appeared to enjoy their reading matter more by sharing the experience with a partner. Pupils were observed reading more in paired reading than in silent reading.
- Pupil interviews showed that the majority of pupils in the intervention group preferred paired reading to silent reading.
- Silent reading did not help the poorer readers.
- Paired reading was initially difficult for the tutor to monitor.
- Pupils' choice of reading material was an issue and the tutor observed that the pairings were more productive when both partners enjoyed the book.
- 'Post-its' were used by the pupils to record observations of the text and difficult words and by the tutor as a means of monitoring and feedback. Spelling mistakes were addressed in a tutor group spelling programme.

Introduction

At Castle Rock School 48% of pupils had not attained Level 4 on entry in 1997, and this fell to 45% in 1998. In order to raise the reading attainment of pupils across Key Stage 3 it was necessary to determine the most effective strategy to employ.

The school promotes daily silent reading for 20 minutes after lunch, in tutor time, as a way to improve reading. The disadvantage of Everyone Reading In Class (ERIC) in this way is that direct teaching does not take place. It assumes that pupils will improve their reading by practising which is not necessarily the case. Essential features of any new strategy, therefore, had to involve supported reading with feedback to the teacher on the learning that was taking place. Clipson-Boyles (1996) described 4 levels of interaction with the text:

- responsive;
- semantic;
- syntactic; and
- grapho-phonemic.

Feedback on these aspects was needed to inform direct instruction by the teacher.

The Project

Two Year 7 tutor groups were involved in the project. One class, 7T, composed of 22 mixed ability pupils took part in the intervention. The second class, 7G, with 20 mixed ability pupils, acted as the control group and continued with silent reading. The control group pupils were unaware of the intervention.

The project lasted for 11 weeks. Pupils were tested at the start and end of that time using the NFER Group Reading Test II. Tutors and pupils were interviewed and filled in questionnaires, before and after the intervention. The intervention group was observed by the researchers at regular intervals during the intervention and the tutor kept a diary of pupils' responses

Paired Reading: The Intervention Strategy

From a survey of the literature a paired reading scheme was devised and this was adapted by using 'post-its' to provide feedback to the teacher.

Guidance given to students

Pupils were given detailed guidance about how to share the book, how to use the small post-its for difficult words and the large post-its to make any comments about what had been read, the content of the story, the characters, etc. The pupils were given time at the end of each session to discuss the reading and make any further comments on the post-its, note the page number on the book mark, and date and initial post-its before placing them on the board. The tutor could monitor the post-its, address the difficulties that the pupils had encountered and give them feedback about their commentaries of the text. The post-its were returned to the pupils and held in their reading folders as a record of progress.

In most cases the pupils worked in friendship pairs to increase their motivation.

Each pupil in the intervention group was given a bookmark with the aim of encouraging their co-operation in the project.

The following timetable was used:

Week 1

- Standardised reading tests and questionnaires were completed by both groups.
- 9 pupils from each group were interviewed.
- The tutors were interviewed.
- Silent reading sessions were observed.

Week 2

- Pupils in the intervention group were taught paired reading technique and how to use the post- its and bookmarks.
- Observation of paired reading sessions took place.

Week 3-4

- Paired reading sessions continued.

Week 5

- Progress was reviewed and teaching strategies were developed, based on feedback obtained from the pupils about their reading progress.

Week 6-9

- Paired reading continued.
- Teacher intervened to develop pupils' skills and responses to text.

Week 10-11

- Questionnaires were completed by both groups.
- Pupils and tutors were interviewed a second time.
- Both groups were observed during reading sessions.

Week 12

- Standardised reading tests were completed by both groups.
- Final observations were made.
- Debriefing and target setting took place

Results

Tutor interviews

Initially the intervention tutor saw silent reading as being effective in calming the pupils down after lunch and it easy to monitor -

"with silent reading you can tell they are on task".

At the end of the intervention the teacher made the following observations:

- the pupils seemed to enjoy their reading more by sharing it with a partner;
- it was difficult to distinguish between pupils discussing the book and those just chatting;
- sometimes the book was not enjoyed by both pupils and choice of reading material became more of an issue than when pupils were reading silently and their enjoyment (or not) was less obvious;

- keeping the reading books in the classroom meant that they were always available;
- problems arose if pupils were poor attenders; their partners were less motivated and involved when they had to read by themselves;
- the only mixed gender pair took longer to settle and agree on their choice of book than the friendship pairs but, once settled, they enjoyed their reading and the boy made 34 months progress during the course of the intervention (the girl was absent and missed the test); and
- the pupils appeared to enjoy using the post-its and were motivated to keep their recording up to date. The tutor, however, felt that the data collected in this way was superficial and difficult to interpret and that in the future the pupils would benefit from a more structured approach.

Pupil interviews and questionnaires

At the outset both groups were fairly evenly split between those who did and those who didn't like silent reading.

After 5 weeks, 14 pupils in the intervention groups preferred paired reading and 6 preferred silent reading. At week 12, 16 pupils preferred paired reading and 2 preferred silent reading. However, when the same pupils were asked if they liked silent reading, once again they were evenly split. In future, 9 pupils would like to have paired reading, 3 silent reading and 5 would like both. This was reflected in the questionnaires where some pupils welcomed the opportunity to read undisturbed but were equivocal about the benefits of silent reading. Some pupils said that they didn't think either method helped them -

"we were as good at reading when we started the book."

Reading observations

The reading sessions were observed by the researchers.

During the second week the paired reading sessions went well with pairs reading 8 or 9 pages in 10 minutes. By week 5 there was more off-task behaviour and the group took longer to settle than the control group.

All the pairs were filling in the post-its but the quality of the comments, without direct teacher intervention was superficial; many comments were about the quality of the partner's reading than about the quality of the book.

"Matthew is very fast and needs to slow down."

"Lauren read clearly and loudly. The book is very exciting."

The notes of errors showed that pupils were either not making too many errors or the errors were not being recorded. This may have been due to difficulties being sorted out within the pairs and given less importance.

The observer gave each pair a written response to their post-it folder to improve the quality of the comments.

Observation of the silent reading sessions showed that pupils were very quiet and the teacher moved around the class. Some pupils did not appear to turn any pages during the session suggesting that they were less focused on the text than when reading to a partner.

NFER Group Reading Test II Results

This test measures context comprehension.

The score for each child was standardised to take into account the age of the child. A standardised score of 100 would be average for a child of that age, more than 110, above average and less than 90, below average. If a pupil made progress in line with his/her age the standardised score would be unchanged.

The table shows that 12 children in the intervention group and 7 in the control group achieved beyond their chronological expectation, i.e. their standardised scores increased. Standardised scores remained the same for one child in the intervention group and 4 children in the control group.

Seven pupils in each group regressed i.e. they did not make progress in line with their age, but this regression was less pronounced in the intervention group than in the control group.

Intervention Group	
	<i>pupils</i>
Increased standardised score	12
Same standardised score	1
Decreased standardised score	7
Absent for all or part of the test	2
Control Group	
Increased standardised score	7
Same standardised score	4
Decreased standardised score	7
Absent for all or part of the test	2

This evidence suggests that a move away from silent reading benefited the majority of children in the intervention group. Pupil interviews suggested that this could have been due to motivational factors, such as the use of post-its, the change in routine and the opportunity to share a book with someone else.

Issues

The findings have raised issues which will be taken forward by the school.

- Paired reading encouraged dialogue about the text. The quality of this dialogue could be developed by a more structured approach, regular teacher intervention and feedback.
- The paired reading, using post-its, was welcomed by the pupils. It was manageable, and had the potential to provide the teacher with feedback on the reading skills of the pupils. With further development, such as listing specific points for the pupils to address on the post-its, rather than leaving the nature of the pupils' comments open ended; and more structure, this could become a useful tool for pupils' difficulties to be flagged-up and addressed by the teacher. The school plans further trials in the next academic year.

In conjunction with the Key Stage 3 National Literacy Strategy, this evidence has been used to develop a school-wide multi-strategy approach to improve reading skills in the school.

Further reading

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Publication number 127/7-00

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