

# Using a Lesson Study continuing professional development (CPD) approach in literacy: Improving writing (Year 5)

## Teacher's initial assessments and observation

*I need to decide on my starting point for using Lesson Study as an approach*

### Some children

Some children are making good progress in creating and shaping fiction texts at the planning and drafting stages (developing characters, setting and plot) but they do not adapt their oral language appropriately to the written mode. The children are confident and creative when telling stories but lack imagination and accuracy when asked to write for more formal or varied purposes. The evidence for this shows most clearly at sentence level in their independent writing.

### My concerns

- The sentences they use are structurally repetitive and usually short.
- They rely heavily on simple sentences or coordinated sentences that are usually linked by 'and'.
- When the children do use subordinated clauses, they are inaccurate and create poor cohesion. For example, they often fail to maintain tense in longer sentences or they lose track of pronoun referents within and between sentences.

- Noun phrases are usually short and only expanded with adjectives. This limitation means that the children cannot adapt their style effectively for different narrative forms.
- Their use of punctuation to demarcate sentence boundaries is insecure. Commas are often used in place of full stops, and exclamation marks are overused.

Although these children enjoy editing their writing and reflecting on their written outcomes and are developing skills of peer and self-assessment, they focus mainly on vocabulary choice and spelling at the expense of improving sentence structure and variation. They do not habitually self-correct grammatical inaccuracies.

### Teacher's questions

- What can I do to improve the *range of sentence structures* the children use?
- How can I encourage children to apply in their writing what they learn from their reading – especially about *connectives* and their effects?
- Is their lack of *accuracy* (tense, pronouns, punctuation) due to a lack of focus/application in their composition and editing or are there gaps in their knowledge?
- What can I do to broaden the children's focus onto style/sentences when they *edit* their writing or *self-assess*?
- Do children in other classes show the same weaknesses and, if so, have other teachers found learning or teaching *approaches that work*?
- What *resources* are available to support teaching and learning: *sentence construction* (connectives, subordination), *sentence grammar* (tense, pronouns) and *punctuation* (demarcating sentence boundaries with full stops and exclamation marks)?

## **Step 1: Analyse assessment and observation information to sharpen the focus**

### ***I need to build a picture of children's progress and attainment in writing by gathering evidence***

What information is already available to help me plan how to make the best use of a Lesson Study approach to accelerate progress in writing for a focus group of children?

#### **Learning**

- What information do I have that informs me about children's progress and attainment in strands 9 and 11?
- What information is available from *AfL* in assessment focuses (AFs) 5 and 6?
- What does tracking of children's progress over time reveal about particular aspects of writing where progress is slow?

#### **Teaching**

- Where in my planning or other notes can I find information about my teaching of writing, particularly strands 9 and 11?
- What skills or knowledge did I plan to teach this term as consolidation, revision or extension that children are still not able to apply in their writing?
- Are there any other ways I can reflect on the *content* (what I have taught children about writing) and the *pedagogy* (approaches, methods and resources) I use?
- Which learning and teaching strategies are proving the most or least effective?
- How do I know that?

***I need to use available evidence to identify patterns of unsatisfactory progress***

- Which children are making slower progress in writing than in reading?
- When I compare children's writing in different contexts, do different patterns emerge? For example:
  - Are they having more difficulty with writing fiction than non-fiction or when writing extended texts?
  - How do their levels of accuracy compare in different kinds of writing activities across the curriculum?
- Do children understand why writers use complex sentences? Can they recognise the effect of subordination on style and depth of information?
- What range of connectives do children *understand* (when they are reading) and *use* (when they are talking and writing)?
- Do children know how to demarcate sentence boundaries correctly? Do they understand the difference between the function of a full stop, a comma and an exclamation mark for marking the end of a sentence?
- When children are editing their writing, do they notice when they slip between tenses or fail to link a pronoun to its referent? Do they understand why these inaccuracies can confuse a reader?

## **Step 2: Decide who you can work with to carry out the Lesson Study**

### ***I need to identify colleagues to work with me on the Lesson Study***

- Have any other teachers identified the same issues about progress in writing in their own classes?
- Are any of these colleagues interested and willing to undertake a Lesson Study on this topic?
- Which combination of teachers involved would maximise the usefulness of the Lesson Study's findings? (For example, teachers with pupils in Years 4, 5 and 6 could work together and add a focus on planning for progression or, in a large school, three Year 5 teachers could make up the Lesson Study Group.)

### ***We need to establish the basis for the Lesson Study Group***

- Has the headteacher agreed to our working arrangements and the dedicated time we need to undertake the Lesson Study, including planning, joint observation and review time?
- Does everyone understand and feel comfortable about what is involved in Lesson Study as an approach to continuing professional development (CPD): sharing ideas, being observed, observing and giving feedback?
- Do my colleagues in the group agree with my initial assessments and observations as the starting point for the Lesson Study?

### **Step 3: Agree on the focus, methods, roles and rules**

#### ***We need to plan the process and methods for the Lesson Study***

- What will be the outcomes? What are the questions we want to answer?
- How will we evaluate our success? What are our success criteria?
- What is the timeline? We will need a diary plan for planning, observations and review meetings.
- How will we record and share our observations and develop a learning log that captures the evidence of impact on children's learning?

#### ***We need to agree the roles and rules***

- Who will teach the study lessons and in which classes? Who else will be involved – for example, teaching assistants?
- Who will have access to any notes and records we keep?
- What information will we share with the children involved?
- How will we communicate our findings?
- How will we identify our personal professional development?

## **Step 4: Find out what has worked for other children and teachers**

### ***We need to build on best practice***

- *What information can our colleagues contribute?* What can they tell us about teaching strategies, learning approaches or resources that have worked well for them? Do they have any useful information to pass on about the ways they are using assessment to inform their teaching and accelerate progress in writing?
- *What can we learn from children* in Year 5 about their knowledge of sentence structure and the way it affects the quality and meaning of a text? When they talk to us about their reading, does this reveal any additional evidence of their understanding?
- *What research evidence is available* on the internet or in other publications? Have there been any recent relevant studies internationally, nationally or locally? What do the findings/data add to our own evidence? Are any similar case studies available that might help us to avoid possible pitfalls during our research?
- *Which particular approaches* are beginning to emerge as the approaches we would like to build into the Lesson Study? How do we intend to maintain a balanced focus on learning *and* teaching? What level of preparation will be required for the lesson teaching and observation schedule before we undertake the study lesson?

## **Step 5: Decide on the focus group of children**

### ***We need to identify a focus group using the assessment data we gathered initially***

From the assessment and progress data I gathered initially, I need to establish which three children represent the range of writing attainment in my class in terms of:

- strand 11 – sentence structure and punctuation (using connectives to create complex sentences, especially subordinated clauses);
- strand 9 – creating and shaping texts (editing and improving their own writing).

### ***We need to establish that the focus group is appropriate for the Lesson Study***

- How can we check the children's current levels of skill, knowledge and understanding?
- What kind of questions will we ask them to obtain the information we need? (Talk to the children about their writing. Identify their strengths and which gaps in their understanding are limiting their progress.)
- As a result of these discussions, do we need to select a different child/different children and repeat the checks?
- Before the Lesson Study Group plans the Lesson Study in detail for our focus group, are we in agreement about the assessment profile we have drawn up for each of the three children in the aspects of writing on which the Lesson Study will focus?
- Do we all feel that we have captured a secure, accurate and well-rounded picture of each child's attainment and progress as the starting point for our observations?

- What writing targets for the focus group will we use when planning, teaching and observing the first study lesson?

## **Step 6: Together plan a study lesson with the focus group in mind**

***We need to plan the first study lesson: what do the children need to learn next and how will this be taught?***

### **Learning**

- What do the three assessment profiles indicate each child should learn next if they are to make progress in their writing?
- How will the learning objectives be shared with the children as targets?

### **Teaching**

- What does our information tell us about the most effective way(s) to teach these learning objectives?
- What needs to be changed or be approached differently?
- Do any aspects of teaching need increased emphasis, range or precision?
- Which are the most appropriate resources?

### **Planning**

How will the study lesson:

- address the questions we want to answer as part of our enquiry?
- build on guidance drawn from our previous discussions, the assessment profiles and the Primary Framework to plan the specific learning for the focus children in this lesson?
- introduce or adapt some of the researched ideas and practices?

- set out what each child in the focus group is expected to learn in the lesson?
- identify the new approaches, the expected outcomes from these innovations and any associated risks?
- include guidance for the observers on what to look for and how to record their observations?

## **Step 7: Teach and together observe and assess the learning of the focus group**

***We need to gather and review evidence that will help us find out what and how the children in the focus group learn during the study lesson, what progress they make and what barriers to learning they encounter***

### **During the lesson**

#### ***Teaching***

One member of the Lesson Study Group teaches the planned lesson. Although this colleague will not necessarily record notes, they will contribute fully to the post-lesson review, so our observation focuses will be important to bear in mind while teaching.

#### ***Observation***

The remaining members of the Lesson Study Group record their observations of the children in the focus group as agreed beforehand. Observations recorded should match the planned areas for discussion in the post-lesson review.

*(Suggestions are given below.)*

### **After the lesson**

#### ***Review***

- How did the involvement, response and progress of the children in the focus group compare with those of the rest of the class?
- How did the group engage and interact with other children and with the literacy activities?

- Was the lesson content (for example, teacher explanation or activities) at the right level for each child in the focus group?
- What did they achieve? What progress did they make?
- Does their progress match the progress planned for and predicted?
- Is there any evidence that the children connected their new learning with prior learning?
- Do the children in the focus group understand what they are learning and why it will be useful?
- What are the behaviour patterns of the focus group (on/off task, persevering/giving up, working quickly/slowly, talking/misbehaving, collaborating/independence)?
- Which activities or phases of the lesson engaged and challenged the focus group and which did not?
- Which of the innovations were most effective and had most impact on the children's progress?
- Did any of the anticipated risks have a negative effect on learning?

## **Step 8: Together review learning in light of the planned learning outcome**

***The Lesson Study Group needs to analyse the information gathered during the study lesson, as well as additional information from the lesson review, to evaluate how successfully the children learned. This will mean discussing the lesson with the children in the focus group and meeting to discuss the lesson observations in detail as soon after the lesson as possible***

### **What did we find out?**

- What do our recorded observations and post-lesson discussion lead us to hypothesise about the children's learning during the lesson?
- What have we learned about what worked and what did not?
- Can we come to any tentative conclusions at this stage?
- What else do we need to find out? Are we missing out on any important evidence because of the approaches we are using to teach the lesson or observe it?

### **What progress are we making towards answering our initial questions about progress in writing?**

- After returning to our original questions and observation schedule and considering the outcomes of the study lesson, what do we need to focus on next?
- Are there ways that we could usefully extend our research?
- Do we need to revise or reframe our enquiry questions or create new ones?

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- How can we test our hypotheses during the next study lesson?
- What information needs updating in the focus group's assessment profiles?
- What is the most efficient way to manage all the information we have collected so far?

## **Step 9: Together plan, teach and observe further study lessons**

***We need to plan the next lessons that will be used for Lesson Study to extend or explore our ideas, test our hypotheses, confirm our conclusions and build our evidence base***

- What do we need to update or change as we move through the process of discussion, collaboration, planning, teaching/observation and review?

We might consider the following:

- updating the Lesson Study Group's learning log;
- reviewing the membership of the focus group;
- adjusting our questions to inform the study lessons;
- refining our hypotheses about what improves children's writing;
- amending the targets for the focus group;
- changing the levels of support and scaffolding for the children's independent work;
- planning intervention in specific areas where progress was least evident;
- asking the children in the focus group what they have learned;
- updating our research to ensure we continue to innovate and build on best practice;
- acknowledging and valuing unexpected responses or negative outcomes so that we learn from them;
- finding a wider range of ways to collect evidence that can be analysed and shared after the lesson – for example, audio, still or video recording.

## **Step 10: Decide how to share learning and disseminate the approach to others**

***We need to review our own learning, update our learning log and identify key findings to share with others***

- How can we share our findings with colleagues so that our learning can have an impact on their practice?
- What do they need to know about the process we went through in the Lesson Study approach to CPD? What information will be useful to them from each of steps 1 to 9?
- How can we present the information clearly and in different ways?
- How could we demonstrate the way that our case study in literacy has scope to show how this approach is relevant across the age range in our school and in other areas of the curriculum?

## **Next steps: Future CPD activity**

### ***We need to decide where we want to go from here***

- How successful was our presentation? Which aspects could be improved when we undertake a similar activity in the future?
- What kind of support could we offer to colleagues who wish to use a Lesson Study approach themselves?
- Are there further areas of literacy learning and teaching we want to review and improve? How might we use a Lesson Study approach to address these?
- What would we do differently next time?
- Do we wish to continue working together as a Lesson Study Group, create a new group or use a different approach to CPD?
- How does the CPD we have undertaken inform the performance review process? What information does it add to our own CPD profile and future needs?