

Developing Spoken Language Skills, Vocabulary and Oracy Competency to Improve Pupil Outcomes

Overview

Limited access to language, vocabulary and low levels of pupil oracy confidence were identified by CEOs and Heads as key inhibiting factors to school improvement. This issue underpinned and compounded many other barriers to learning, particularly for disadvantaged pupils, both in terms of academic success and broader life chances.

With a particular focus on addressing social and academic disadvantage, this project aimed to: support the development of high quality language rich learning environments; improve the teaching and assessment of oracy to improve pupils' language development and increase opportunities for networking and sharing of best practice beyond phase, MAT and LA boundaries.

This project involved a diverse group of schools from across the Sheffield City Region. They represented a range of contexts and communities but all had identified oracy and language deprivation as a common barrier to sustained improvement. Each school identified a focus group of pupils.

Good practice to share with others interested in running school improvement projects to ensure projects deliver the intended outcome.

- The Oracy project promoted a school-led individualised approach and, although perhaps slightly more difficult to coordinate logistically, the investment in a more bespoke and tailored approach seems to have been beneficial. This approach has allowed continuous engagement and enabled the work to be more sustainable into the future; a number of leaders from schools that undertook projects on similar themes have visited each other and, in some cases, have agreed to established working parties. This was supported by clear contracting upfront and ensuring there was sufficient capacity (through the NLEs in particular) in advance of the project commencing.
- Despite a number of headship and CEO changes throughout the project which did present a number of challenges to both the school and the accountable teaching school, no school disengaged from the project and all were able to demonstrate positive impact. Contextual status of a school can change the level of engagement, however, because of the project structure, individualised approach and the way the schools were supported (both one-to-one support and through the collaborative CPD), all schools have been able to engage and still benefit from the work.
- In summary, the following aspects have been beneficial and worked particularly well:

- high level of ongoing high quality CPD
- networks to promote collaboration across the project (and support sustainability beyond the project)
- regular NLE visits and a regular audit review process

What the project may do differently in the future.

- Despite the contracting upfront and the involvement of the CEOs, it has sometimes proved difficult to get information back from the schools, particularly in some of the more vulnerable ones and those experiencing a high level of staff turnover, therefore, different systems and processes would be considered that would allow this to be done more effectively.
- Where external partners to support the project were used, it has worked overwhelmingly well which, in part, is due to their professionalism and high quality service but is also testament to the contracting and brokerage prior to the work commencing. However, there is a risk associated with using different providers and it has required a significant investment from the central team to ensure this is well coordinated.
- Funding was one area that we had anticipated some difficulties throughout the lifespan of the project, however, the approach of 'payment on engagement' (rather than upfront) seems to have worked well and ensured good value for money.

Sustainability measures taken by the project to ensure improvements are sustained beyond the funding period.

- Teachers attended a research day at Sheffield Hallam University for writing development activities. The teachers were actively engaged in the discussion of research outputs presented during the seminar and contributed perspectives from their own classroom experiences of learner participation. The teacher research projects have had a positive impact on teachers' sense of esteem and understanding of pedagogy; disseminating this aspect of the project to a wider audience is important.
- Some of the teachers involved in the SSIF work have accepted the offer to participate in the dissemination of research from this project to a wider audience at the UKLA International Conference 2019, comprising international scholars and teachers in the field of literacy.
- One of the schools involved in the project was designated as an English Hub and an accredited provider of letters and sounds during

the project. Through this and the wider TSA role, the project has been able to sustain a number of impactful and well received examples of the bespoke CPD offered and ensure a greater number of schools have access to the provision.

- In the final project evaluation, each school was asked to identify another school with which they would disseminate and share learning from the project. These CPD activities were designed to further support the dissemination and sustained development of both new and existing schools.