Developing story-writing skills with Year 2 pupils using ICT

The school

Located in a suburb of a major northern city, this Church aided first school provides schooling from reception to Year 4. By the age of five most children meet or exceed the national expectations. By the end of Key Stage 1 pupils’ attainment is well above national standards in English, mathematics, science, design and technology, information technology and music. Planning is very detailed throughout the school and is used very effectively to promoted focused learning.

The teacher

This Year 2 teacher has been teaching at this school for eight years, principally in Key Stage 1. She attributes her ICT skills, which were non-existent until she joined the staff, to the extremely patient IT co-ordinator and from working with the children. She sees teaching as quite an isolated job and values contact with other colleagues. She values her school where:

“you can actually go to a colleague and talk about any problems that you’ve got or share good practice or just knock ideas about.”

While very positive about using ICT in the curriculum she states that:

“If I haven’t organised and planned for using the computer I don’t switch it on.”

She is also eager to point out the benefits she derives from using ICT for record keeping, planning and classroom management. When using ICT in the curriculum she looks for imaginative ways to link with other areas of the curriculum, always making sure ICT is not taught in isolation. However, she is conscious of the fact that ICT skills must be taught and is very specific in targeting the skills she wants the children to concentrate on while working at the computer. Her usual approach when introducing new ICT skills to the class is to begin with a whole class lesson. As part of the project the teacher was able to bring her class each term to the Univerisity to ensure that the pupils learned the skills they needed in order to focus in school on her literacy objectives.

“IT has been really nice having someone in the classroom taking a genuine interest in what is going on.”

This teacher is very reflective and analytical about her practice. She is always questioning what she does and looking for ways to improve her teaching. She was very positive about having members of the project team in her classroom. As mentioned previously she sees teaching as a rather isolated profession and welcomed the opportunity to talk through her lessons with team members.

“If I haven’t organised and planned for using the computer I don’t switch it on.”

The teacher working with a group of pupils at the University to teach particular skills. The arrangement of the seats and computers is not ideal for primary pupils.
The pupils

This class of year two pupils were achieving well above national average in both English and ICT. Many of the children have access to computers at home. The teacher wanted a project that would improve their collaborative story writing and would stretch their ICT skills.

Three pupils from the class with their stories

When working on ICT activities the class usually work in mixed ability groups of two or three. The children work well together in these groups supporting each other with the task at hand.

The children are confident both in using a variety of computer programs and in file management, being able to save and retrieve their work with ease.

The aim of the project

This project focused on improving children’s imaginative writing and building on their already accomplished ICT skills. The pupils had recently completed an art project, looking at the work of Kandinsky then emulating his work both in pastels and on the computer. The teacher wanted to build on this ICT work in the story writing process. In addition, as the class had recently received a new computer with which both the teacher and class were unfamiliar, the teacher hoped both she and the pupils would gain a better understanding of how to manage their computer work more effectively.

The teacher’s choices

The teacher chose to use two programs, one a painting program which also has the facility to make slide shows (KidPix / Brøderbund Software) the other an integrated package (Claris Works/Claris Corporation) both of which the children were accustomed to using. The teacher chose not to use the painting facilities within the integrated software at this stage because of the children’s skills in using KidPix.

The children were familiar with the painting program but they had never created slide shows. In this respect the teacher wanted to use the program to improve their ICT skills and allow their work to be viewed by a wider audience. This was to help the children be aware of the difference between spoken and written language and to make use of more formal elements in written language. The integrated program the children used for editing and refining their stories was not used to extend their ICT skills. For this part of the project the teacher wanted the children to focus on improving their story writing and not on the technology.

The children worked in groups of two or three, drafting a story board on paper first. Once their initial story was down on paper they used the painting package to create each page, first painting the picture then adding their text. The separate pages were then saved in a directory the children had created. Once they had completed their paintings they linked the pages together in a slide show adding sounds, spoken text, and a transition between pages. When the children learned that their slide shows were to be shown to a wider audience than just their classmates many wanted to add a title page with credits.

Starting the story in KidPix

All the children completed the slide show task with enthusiasm and minimum support working from a simple help sheet prepared by the teacher. Once the slide shows had
been completed they were viewed by the whole class, other children in the school and to suitably impressed parents.

![A screen shot of the KidPix Slide show](image)

The teacher understood that the painting program was unsuitable for redrafting text and adopted the following approach to further the pupils’ work.

Each group’s work was transferred into a program (ClarisWorks- Mac/PC) which showed their original picture and text on the top half of the screen, while the bottom of the screen allowed space for word processing. A classroom helper word-processed the children’s text, mirroring the original. This was so that the pupils could use their skills with a program with which they were familiar, but did not have to spend time re-typing their work. This was because of the limitations of the painting program in which text is ‘painted’ onto the screen. Once written the text becomes part of the picture and it cannot be edited. However the teacher chose this approach at this stage of the project so that she could get the best out of the children’s familiarity with the painting program and so that she would not have to teach them how to use the painting facilities within the integrated software. In addition the painting program has some features which were either not available in the integrated software (such as some of the tool functions) or which were easier for the pupils to use (such as the slide show). When she developed this approach the following year with a different class of pupils she chose to use the integrated software and the painting options within the program.

![Final draft showing both the original work and the completed version](image)

The teacher wanted the children to write more sustained stories and develop aspects of key story elements such as the narrative structure or characterisation. These pages were then printed out, original pictures and text in the top half, word processed text in the bottom. The teacher examined each group’s work then instructed the groups on the particular areas for improvement she wanted them to concentrate on. For some pupils it was writing in clear sentences using capital letters and full stops accurately. For others it was improved use of particular elements such as improving the narrative or setting through the use of adjectives and descriptive language. The teacher found the printouts useful as they made her focus on what had been written.

![Final draft showing both the original work and the completed version](image)

After discussion with the teacher the children returned to their work using the word processor to edit and improve their stories, focusing on the comments the teacher had made about their writing. Once completed their work was printed out and made into booklet form.

**Results from the testing**

The teacher did not wish to exclude any pupils from the ICT work. As a result, all students participated in a writing test before the project began. The pupils were then retested at the end of the term’s work.
showing considerable gains in their writing scores. Similar progress was made by pupils in the Autumn term.

While is not possible to attribute these gains solely to their use of ICT the results do suggest that carefully planned and thought through ICT activities with clear learning objectives can play a part in improving pupils’ writing ability.

Although the main focus of the activities had been on improving children’s collaborative writing the teacher also sought to enhance their IT capability. An assessment of the work produced indicated that these particular children were working well above the national expectations.

**Developing this approach**

Although the teacher was very pleased with the progress the summer term pupils had made in their writing she decided to modify the approach with her new Year 2 class in the autumn term. As this new class were rather less adept at using ICT she decided against using both KidPix with its slide show option and ClarisWorks. She felt repeating the same activities with this class would require too much emphasis on the ICT skills.

Instead she decided to use only the writing frame with some modifications. The upper half of the page was used by the pupils directly to paint their pictures on, while the bottom half was used for word processing. As a whole class lesson the teacher demonstrated the basic functions of the painting program. The children were then given time to become familiar with the painting program before starting the writing activity. In groups of two the children drafted a story board on paper then began working at the computer using the modified writing frame. Having already become familiar with the painting program the children were able to work independently at the computer making use of a simple help sheet the teacher had prepared. As with the previous class, the children printed their first draft, received feedback from the teacher then completed their final versions.

**Future plans**

During the project, while improving her own ICT skills, the teacher came to appreciate the flexibility the integrated program offered her. With the introduction of the literacy hour she started to use the program to create active worksheets and templates for one group of children to use within the 20 minute group work session.

“I've been making work at home. I've got a computer that's the same as the computer at school, so obviously that makes it easier, so I've been taking whatever the phonic aspect of the literacy hour has been, and also some grammatical points as well, and making a little programme of work for the children to be able to complete on the computer within that 20 minutes, if that is what has been appropriate for their particular day.”

She sees these activities as very useful and feels she can really tailor them to each group’s needs. Given the structure of the literacy hour she feels she is much more focused on what she wants to achieve with the computer. She is thinking ahead to the numeracy hour and can see opportunities to use the program in a similar manner.

**Features of ICT**

When the children were creating their slide shows they were making use of the capacity and range function of ICT. In particular they were using a range of forms to present information including images, sound and speech.

Provisionality, the function of ICT which allows changes to be made easily and alternatives to be explored readily, permitted the children to edit and refine their work in their writing frames. In their slide show creations this feature of ICT allowed them to experiment with different sound and transition effects.

**Summary**

The teacher was able to make effective use of ICT to improve pupils’ writing. She felt the pupils in the summer term benefited from having a wider audience for their work on slide shows and would have adopted a similar approach in the autumn.
The ICT activities were designed to encourage the children to focus on their writing when drafting and redrafting their work. The teacher used the painting program to teach them specific ICT skills and to encourage creativity in their illustrations as part of her teaching of the IT curriculum. She felt that this encouraged the pupils to develop their stories and use more descriptive language which was part of her specific literacy teaching for the term. She enjoys teaching in this way and likes to develop activities which link together in a meaningful way for pupils.

“The focus of the project was on the literacy. However it was teaching the skills and the use of a painting package to stimulate their imagination when it came to illustrating their story. So because they’d got the skills to be able to paint and produce a picture, I think it developed their actual writing skills. It gave them much more of a purpose and it motivated them to keep going and to want to improve and refine their story.”

She feels she has come to appreciate that you do not necessarily need to make use of overly sophisticated software to use ICT successfully in your teaching.

**Further reading**


(The case studies in Chapter 5 and issues in Chapter 6 are particularly relevant to using multimedia in primary schools.)