

Preamble

This literacy vignettes tool accompanies the Education Endowment Foundation's Improving Literacy in Key Stage 2 guidance report. This report sets out seven recommendations to support teachers and school in developing their pupils' literacy skills. The literacy vignettes are drawn directly from the guidance report and describe scenarios and dilemmas related to literacy provision, similar to those that occur in many primary schools across the country.

The vignettes include prompt questions for school leaders and teachers. These aim to encourage reflection on the scenarios presented and on readers' own existing practices around supporting the development of their pupils' literacy skills. The vignettes seek to represent common challenges faced by educators: not best practice, nor poor practice.

The literacy vignettes can be used to support teacher continuous professional development in a variety of ways. For example, a teacher training session could begin with staff reading and discussing one of the vignettes, and reflecting on implications for their own school context. Alternatively, the vignettes could be shared over a sequence of teacher training sessions. The vignettes are designed to help facilitators identify current levels of knowledge and understand existing practice.

Ms Chowdhury is working to support her Year 5 class to expand their vocabulary. She delivers three 15-minute vocabulary sessions per week. The focus of the sessions is the introduction of a new word, with dictionary work to support understanding. In each lesson, the children are asked to look up the 'word of the day' in the dictionary and then write the word in a sentence.

The children are enjoying these vocabulary activities but Ms Chowdhury is disappointed that they are not retaining and using the vocabulary she has introduced them to. She considers whether this work is worth continuing and, if so, what she can do to improve the retention and use of new vocabulary in the children's expressive language (their use of language in speaking or writing).



Questions for discussion

Why should the teaching of vocabulary not be treated as a single event?

The explicit teaching of new vocabulary should not be seen as an isolated activity. To help pupils to retain and use new vocabulary, teachers should focus on providing pupils with repeated exposure to new vocabulary, including modelling and scaffolding of its use. Repeated exposure to new vocabulary also helps to build pupils' understanding of how new words can be used in different contexts. In the example above, Ms Chowdhury could plan opportunities to use the new words that are introduced during the vocabulary sessions across other periods of teaching and independent activities, providing pupils with the opportunity to hear, read, and use the words in a variety of contexts.

How could the teacher help to make new vocabulary meaningful and memorable for pupils?

Teaching new vocabulary that is linked to curriculum content currently being taught, or texts that pupils are currently reading, may help pupils to engage with the meaning of new vocabulary and see how it is used, as well as providing opportunities for pupils to actively use their new vocabulary in class. Exposing children to new vocabulary across all literacy activities and the wider curriculum also helps to ensure breadth and depth of vocabulary. Ms Chowdhury could therefore consider introducing her class to new vocabulary related to topics being taught that week in science, maths, or history lessons.

Mr Turner has identified reading fluency as a significant area of focus for his Year 4 class. He has organised daily sessions of independent silent reading. He has also planned time for shared reading of a class text. During whole class reading sessions, each child takes their turn to read aloud. This 'round robin' approach, where children are asked to read aloud one after the other, is one Mr Turner uses regularly to facilitate opportunities to develop reading fluency.

Having undertaken these approaches for the first three weeks of the term, the teacher is concerned to see very little evidence of improvement in fluency. In addition, he notices that a number of children are reluctant to read aloud and do not seem to enjoy the lessons.



Questions for discussion

What further approaches should Mr Turner consider to improve pupils' reading fluency?

Mr Turner considers the importance of explicit teaching and how this may include opportunities for children to listen to reading fluency modelled by him during story time. Using that 'expert' model, the child can then be supported to 'have a go' and work to read with similar fluency. To support pupils to practice reading aloud with fluency, Mr Turner could plan guided repeated reading activities in small groups or reading pairs, with feedback to support improvements in fluency with each reading.

How could Mr Turner better understand pupils' fluency difficulties?

Having identified that pupils are struggling to read aloud with fluency, Mr Turner should consider why this might be. It could be that the pupils need further instruction, practice, and feedback in order to become more fluent. Equally, some pupils might be finding it difficult to read with fluency due to underlying weaknesses in decoding letters into sounds and may benefit from additional support in this area. Assessing pupils' strengths and weaknesses in relation to reading fluency and monitoring their progress will help to inform the teacher's next steps and tailor these to the needs of individual pupils (see Box 3 for more information).

A group of Key Stage 2 teachers are meeting to discuss reading test results, which identify that there are ongoing challenges with reading comprehension, showing that a number of children are struggling to understand texts and make inferences. They are keen to plan to address this issue and consider the approaches they could use.

They decide to buy a reading comprehension scheme which provides a series of texts with set questions for the children to provide written answers to in their English lessons. The questions are intended to be completed individually and as part of an ongoing weekly timetable. However, after some months of these lessons, there are ongoing concerns about the impact of this work.



Questions for discussion

Why is it important to explicitly teach reading comprehension strategies?

Some children may learn to read strategically through trial and error as they look to better understand texts that challenge them. However, many children benefit from being explicitly taught techniques and approaches to improve their comprehension of texts. There is evidence that disadvantaged pupils and pupils with lower prior attainment may particularly benefit from being explicitly taught reading comprehension strategies.¹ The Key Stage 2 teachers in this example could support their pupils' progress in reading by teaching pupils how and when to use specific reading comprehension strategies, modelling their use, and providing regular opportunities for pupils to practice the strategies.

Is it sufficient to use 'special texts' with set questions to teach reading comprehension strategies?

Modelling and scaffolding of reading comprehension strategies by the teacher supports children to learn to monitor their reading comprehension and make ongoing inferences when engaging with texts. The use of texts with set questions can provide helpful structure for reading comprehension work but reading comprehension practice can also be undertaken across the curriculum with a wide range of fiction and non-fiction texts, through which pupils learn to apply the strategies in different contexts. Extensive practice should enable a gradual release of responsibility by the teacher, whereby pupils increasingly use reading comprehension strategies independently, with less and less prompting needed from the teacher.²

Ms Howarth has been asked to encourage her Year 3 children to produce further examples of extended writing. She is keen to reflect her commitment to achieving this quickly and would like to demonstrate that the children are producing longer pieces of writing by the time of a review planned by the senior leadership team. To achieve this, she sets up a timetable which includes two sessions each week for longer writing.

After some weeks of following the new timetable, Ms Howarth is considering how to better support the children to engage more positively with the written tasks. Many of them are struggling and indeed some parents have discussed real anxiety for their child when coming to school on the days timetabled for longer pieces of writing.



Questions for discussion

Why is writing so challenging?

Ronald Kellogg, an American literacy expert, argues that writing can be as cognitively demanding as chess.³ It is demanding because children need to coordinate several different processes. For instance, children need to work out what they want to communicate and how, handwrite or type accurately, regulate their own thoughts and behaviour, and monitor their work. Pupils will need extensive instruction, practice, and feedback to become skilled at coordinating these aspects of writing.

What can we do to make written tasks more accessible?

To develop pupils' ability to write at greater length, it can be helpful to think of writing as a task made up of five stages: planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing. Children can be taught, through modelling and scaffolding, strategies which support them to undertake each of these stages of the writing process.

Ms Howarth may want to consider how to make extended writing less daunting for her class. This could be done by initially focusing on one element of the writing process in each session, for example, planning or drafting, with shorter, regular sessions over which the children can complete their extended writing task. Breaking the task down in this way and teaching pupils strategies for approaching each stage of the writing task will also allow children to have time to reflect on and understand the writing process.

In a staff meeting, lower Key Stage 2 teachers are discussing the importance of handwriting and what they should consider when planning handwriting practice lessons. They decide that regular, brief sessions would fit best to their timetable. They discuss the content of the sessions and identify the need for practise in order to avoid common errors in letter formation.

Having made these initial decisions, the teachers start the sessions. The format they adopt includes the use of worksheets that the children complete to practise forming the letters where mistakes are often made. Having completed the sheets, the teacher then checks the work and the children stick them in their books.

As the sessions develop, the teachers notice that several children are still struggling to develop efficient and legible handwriting styles.



Questions for discussion

Why is it important to explicitly teach children to develop an efficient handwriting style?

The aim of handwriting practice is to support children to develop a quick, efficient, and legible handwriting style. Slow or effortful transcription hinders writing composition as pupils have to concentrate on monitoring their handwriting and are less able to think about the content of their writing.⁴

How can feedback support children to develop an efficient handwriting style?

It remains important in Key Stage 2 to monitor for errors in the direction and order of pen strokes during letter formation and to provide pupils with feedback on their handwriting. For example, a letter ‘t’ that is written from bottom to top and then crossed from right to left may be legible on the page, but this approach will be slower and more effortful than writing the ‘t’ from top to bottom and crossing it from left to right, especially when children begin to practise cursive or ‘joined up’ handwriting.

The Key Stage 2 teachers in the example above could consider focusing on observations and feedback during handwriting practice sessions—monitoring how children are forming the letters so that they can provide feedback that will support them to correct any errors in their letter formations.

A senior leadership team are considering strategies to support the assessment of reading in their school. The current arrangements include teachers undertaking summative assessments at the end of each half term. There is recognition that these assessments have been useful when looking to discuss overall attainment but are limited in terms of better understanding pupils' specific areas of need to ensure sustained progress.

The leadership team are keen to support teachers to develop a repertoire of assessment techniques. For example, if a child is finding it difficult to make inferences from a text, formative and diagnostic assessment could be used to ensure clear and specific understanding of this difficulty to inform targeted teaching and support.

The senior leadership team are now reviewing the professional development and diagnostic assessments available to support teachers to undertake this work.



Questions for discussion

How can teachers be supported to develop formative assessment techniques?

Formative assessment is the process of monitoring pupil learning on an ongoing basis as part of day-to-day, whole-class teaching and adapting teaching to meet pupil's learning needs as they change over time.⁵ A focus on developing core classroom teaching strategies, with formative assessment integrated as part of good pedagogy, is a crucial starting point for supporting teachers to target teaching and support to pupils' needs. Therefore, in the example above, professional development that supports teachers to develop these formative assessment techniques is considered a priority by the school's leadership team.

How can diagnostic assessment tools support this work?

Diagnostic assessments are tools that help teachers to identify pupils' specific strengths and learning needs.⁶ There is a range of diagnostic assessment tools available to teachers. Having identified areas of need through formative assessment, these tools can be used to support the decision-making process for how best to target support. The leadership team recognises the need for these tools and selects a small number, with professional development included to ensure the tools are used as intended. The EEF's guidance report on [Effective Professional Development](#) provides further guidance on how schools can select and deliver effective professional development programmes.⁷

Ms Jegede, a headteacher, has been to a meeting in which a number of her fellow school leaders were praising a new evidence-informed intervention for reading. She reflects on the discussion and feels very positive about undertaking the same intervention in her own school. Following assessment of the school budget, she decides to purchase the full package of resources to support delivery of the intervention to children who are struggling to make expected progress in reading.

Having made such a significant financial commitment, Ms Jegede is increasingly disappointed with the lack of impact. She is concerned that the programme may not target the aspects of reading that the children in her school are struggling with. She is also worried about some of the challenges the teachers are facing to timetable the intervention, with constant discussion about how to fit it in to the already busy school timetable.

Ms Jegede reflects on this and considers how best to implement interventions in school.



Questions for discussion

Why might an intervention have varying degrees of success in different schools?

Introducing an evidence-informed intervention does not in itself guarantee impact and success. The unique circumstances of each school are important to consider alongside evidence of positive impact in other schools. This can be thought of as working at the intersection between evidence-informed practice and professional judgement, including knowledge of the unique circumstances in which the school is working. Ensuring conditions are in place to support effective implementation of interventions can also make a difference. The EEF's guidance report on [Putting evidence to work: A school's guide to implementation](#) provides further guidance on this.



What should school leaders consider when deciding on interventions to implement?

The first step when considering a targeted literacy intervention should always be to define the problem you want to solve, identifying a specific area for improvement and making use of diagnostic assessments where needed.⁸ School leaders should then think carefully about the available evidence for how to improve pupil outcomes in this specific area, whether available interventions are supported by evidence, and how possible interventions might fit in with their own school context.

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