



RSC Associate Schools programme Case Study

SCHOOL: Archibald Primary School

REGIONAL THEATRE PARTNER: Royal Shakespeare Company

Year 2 “Teaching to the Test” through Play

Background information

Our School is located in a deprived area where twenty-one different languages are spoken in the school, 54% of children are eligible for free school meals, 18% SEND, 22% EAL and 55% are Pupil Premium pupils. Pupils enter our school with a low baseline with a limited vocabulary and experiences. One of the biggest challenges facing us is pupils' experiences. A number of our pupils in our school do not have the range of experiences to draw upon that many take for granted, despite them living in a close vicinity to places such as the beach. Because they don't have the experience, they have struggled to select vocabulary to use in their writing. A number of years ago, this was identified as a weakness at the end of KS1 with historic data showing that we were previously significantly below Age Related Expectations at the end of KS1.

Developing an Engaging English Curriculum to Raise Standards in Writing

Archibald Primary first started working intensively with the RSC in 2012, becoming a Lead Associate School in 2016. The introduction of the 2014 English Curriculum was challenging. While some Year 2 objectives had been reassigned to the Year 1 curriculum, it was apparent that Year 2 were expected to work to a higher standard. As a Year 2 teacher I was faced with teaching pupils with limited vocabulary. At times it felt like it was an impossible job to teach pupils to write with 'flare' with such a limited vocabulary and experience to draw upon. Writing outcomes were simple, they 'ticked' assessment boxes but lacked 'flare', passion, creativity and an ability to sustain writing.

In the past, pupils have struggled to write coherently and effectively for different purposes. We followed our well-planned English curriculum although we were moving away from what our pupils needed. We recognised that the key to raise standards was to provide pupils with a sense of a real experience and to widen and enhance their range of vocabulary. How can we expect pupils to write for sustained pieces of writing, to write with flare, creativity and passion while also including a powerful range of vocabulary if they have not been immersed with the experience and without any experience of a wide range of vocabulary? We recognised that we



needed to provide these valuable opportunities to all our pupils if we wanted to positively impact upon pupils' achievements.

Since embedding RSC rehearsal room techniques in our curriculum in 2014, they have been key to providing the pupils with new experiences. They have 'opened the door', providing pupils with the experience and the opportunities to use new language which they are able to transfer into their writing. Because they have 'experienced', for example, exploring Prospero's island, they can transfer this into their writing. They have stepped into character and have lived and breathed being on a deserted island. Instantly I saw the impact of this experience. Pupils were desperate to share 'their' experience of the island. They naturally and without hesitation stepped into character, taking on the characters as Prospero and Miranda with 'Prospero' protecting 'Miranda', guiding her to safety around the island.

Speaking and listening skills are essential to being an effective writer. Freeze frames introduce powerful language that pupils are desperate to include in their own writing. Seeing the impact of this, reading the quality of the writing, witnessing first hand pupils writing with flare for sustained pieces of writing, we saw the impact on pupils' aspirations, attitudes and achievements. Rehearsal room techniques are the key to raising standards in writing. Pupils who had once been reluctant writers or those who 'didn't know what to write' were passionate and eager to write, desperately wanting to include this new vocabulary which they had been submerged with in the rehearsal room. A reluctant writer told me "I want to use those new words... *hagborn and Freckled Whelp* that we used in the hall to describe Caliban. I really like them." Rehearsal room techniques had provided them with a personal experience they could relate to and an experience they wanted to write about. The pupils aspired to be actors, viewing rehearsal room practice with the same professional attitude of an actor.

Audience and purpose are key. Our pupils write in role and become someone else they have been learning about. Writing tasks are carefully planned for each year group to ensure that the writing task fits the Assessment Criteria. Writing is more effective when the pupils know that their writing will be read by an audience. It gives them a reason to write effectively. Tasks are constantly reviewed and tweaked to ensure that they meet the assessment criteria and to ensure that the writing opportunities meet the personalised needs of the pupils.

As the Year 2 Team Leader since we first started working with the RSC in 2012, I have successfully led the Year 2 Team to use these techniques in our curriculum. Through our intensive work with the RSC, we regularly work alongside RSC practitioners. This is whole school CPD and allows the exciting opportunity to work with experienced, inspiring and highly motivating practitioners. Working alongside



these practitioners has inspired our staff and has changed the way that even experienced staff teach. This is what we set out to achieve. As Lead teachers, we wanted our staff to be able to share the same experiences that we had experienced in Stratford. If we truly wanted to see the impact of using rehearsal room techniques, it needed to be more than three Lead Teachers using these techniques in their own classroom. For it to work, it had to be a whole school approach. Working with practitioners captivated our staff. Some members of staff, who can be difficult to engage commented that it was the best CPD they had accessed and had made them reflect on the way that they teach. On reflection it is difficult to even to begin to remember how we taught without these techniques. Engaging with the RSC partners has transformed the way we teach, has impacted positively on standards in our school and transformed our whole school identity.

| Year 2 Data since working with the RSC | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------------------------|-------|-------------|-------------|-------------|------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|
| KS1 (% at each NC level) | | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 |
| Reading | % L2+ | 63 | 87 | 89 | | | | |
| | %L2b+ | | 68 | 72 | EXS | 79% | 72.9% | 71% |
| | % L3 | 0 | 21 | 14 | GDS | 24% | 14% | 24% |
| Writing | % L2+ | 54 | 85 | 89 | | | | |
| | %L2b+ | | 55 | 49 | EXS | 65% | 69.5% | 69.5% |
| | % L3 | 0 | 4 | 5 | GDS | 7% | 3% | 20% |

Measuring Success



There has been a positive impact on standards in school which we attribute to working intensively with the RSC. Our results show that we are on an upward trend from 2013 when 54% achieved ARE. Our most recent results (2018) show that 69.5% of Year 2 pupils are attaining ARE, leaving KS1 at Expected Standard (EXS). Shakespeare's work combined with rehearsal room pedagogy has supported pupils to achieve Expected Standard (EXS) when they would have otherwise struggled. The most striking of results is the increase in the number of pupils attaining Greater Depth (GDS). In 2013, no pupils attained Level 3. Impressively 2018 marks a turning point for pupils attaining GDS. There has been a significant increase from 3% of pupils achieving GDS (2017) to 20% of pupils attaining GDS in 2018. I attribute this significant increase to Shakespeare's work combined with rehearsal room pedagogies. They allow the pupils the freedom to write creatively, with flare, passion and the ability to write for sustained pieces of writing, which is something that pupils in the past have found challenging. The impact of rehearsal room pedagogies is that they allow higher order thinking skills. Having the first-hand experience and access to a wide range of vocabulary allows pupils to secure working at EXS and have challenged pupils further, moving them in to working at GDS.

The Year 2 SAT's, an assessment of what the pupils have been taught across the key stage, assess pupils progress in the curriculum in year 1 and 2. Rehearsal room pedagogies are most effective when it is a whole school approach and the techniques are consistent. They are at the heart of our curriculum, underpinning everything that we do. They are bespoke to our 'Whole School Bigger Picture', ensuring that we offer our pupils a broad, balanced, highly motivating and inspiring curriculum that supports our pupils to become clear-thinking and enlightened citizens. Part of my role leading RSC development is to ensure that rehearsal room techniques are firmly embedded across EYFS and KS1. Throughout the year, I work alongside EYFS and KS1 staff ensuring that Rehearsal Room Techniques are firmly embedded in their curriculum, tweaking the writing outcomes to ensure that we capture the most effective writing. As a leader, I strive to ensure that the standard in writing is high, to ensure that we have fine-tuned the writing outcomes to motivate our learners ensuring that they produce high quality writing that fits our English Teacher Assessment Framework criteria. Whilst my focus is this, the pupils interestingly do not view it as 'learning' as such. For them it is fun, active, 'on their feet' collaborative, engaging and inspiring. Unbeknown to them they are learning through play! Without realising it, this experiential learning is preparing them for the writing outcomes, providing them with the experience, immersing them with the language, flare and creativity to allow them to become immersed in the writing task. The fact that they are active in this experiential learning supports their knowledge and comprehension. Links are made between these experiences and their learning. Because they have a deeper understanding, they are confidently able to apply this in their written outcome. They are able to make connections between



the rehearsal room techniques, formulating them for an audience and purpose, elements which are key in Bloom's Taxonomy of Cognitive Development.

To ensure that our writing judgements are accurate, we actively and regularly moderate pupils writing across school. Our recent LEA and School Improvement Partner (SIP) Moderations have highlighted that a strength of our pupils writing is the pupils' language choice. Interestingly, this in the past has been highlighted as our weakness. All pupils, working at different levels are able to choose exciting, new vocabulary for effect which is one of our school's assessment criteria. Our School Improvement Partner has commented that pupils are able to sustain longer pieces of writing. Lower attaining pupils are enthusiastic, motivated and inspired to write. As a teacher, these techniques have changed the way I teach. Because I have seen the impact on achievements, aspirations and pupils' attitudes, I plan to use them in my teaching wherever possible.

I am a moderator for the Local Authority (LEA) which involves me visiting schools during the assessment period to moderate teachers' judgement in Reading and Writing. It is a common theme that staff have identified that while pupils writing ticks the technical elements of Expected Standard (EXS), it lacks passion, flare and creativity. Perhaps because they have not accessed an experiential curriculum that the RSC techniques would allow, pupils have not gained first hand experiences which they can draw upon and subsequently can transfer into their independent writing.

During our Special Week in Spring 2019, EYFS and KS1 will collaboratively work together to perform *The Tempest*. Our RSC Scheme of Work plans for *The Tempest* to be studied starting in Nursery through to Year 2 to allow each year group to build on the previous year. It is our intention to start small in Nursery. Nursery builds the foundations, to expose pupils to Shakespeare's language and to introduce them to the characters, building upon this in Reception where they create the storm. Starting small is key. It allows us to build upon prior knowledge and experience, allowing progression and continuity. Imagine how much spoken language and personal experiences a child who starts their Shakespeare journey in Nursery will have by the time they reach Year 6. This is something that I have learnt since leading the programme. This time, Nursery will be included in the final performance. Two years ago, Nursery participated in the Special Week although pupils were not involved in the performance. The activities that they completed proved that they were immersed in Shakespeare and were able to access his work at their own level.

As part of this week, Teachers will be asked to produce a writing outcome. It is two years since our last production of *The Tempest*. The performance to parents was overwhelming and was oversubscribed to say the least. In fact, we had to plan



further workshops that parents were invited to, to showcase rehearsal room pedagogy. Parents excitedly watched as we worked collaboratively to build ensemble, then watched in amazement as their child performed in a Shakespeare play. Many of our parents carry the misconception that 'Shakespeare is for posh people', that it is not for them. These parents watched closely as their child performed on stage reciting lines and more importantly understanding these words. For me, this was a key moment in my career, one that I will treasure. Listening to parents praising their child, describing how they had watched in disbelief that their child was able to understand Shakespeare's language. Their child was accessing Shakespeare which they associated with negative experiences of studying at Secondary School.

Sharing with the Associate Schools

As well as leading rehearsal room techniques in my own school, I have worked with our Cluster Schools, leading by example. Using my own practice within my own class, I have supported staff to explore rehearsal room techniques. I have supported staff that were new to these 'playful' techniques to plan and use them effectively to deliver their own curriculum. The impact of this is that schools that have seen this have wanted to join our cluster. Our successful cluster of sixteen schools is continuing to grow and develop with many schools from neighbouring authorities expressing their interest to join.

Prospective schools visit our school to see rehearsal room techniques. During model sessions, I have shown Associate Visitors a variety of rehearsal room techniques to demonstrate the impact that they have upon pupil's vocabulary and the impact on raising standards. During these sessions, I have successfully modelled the 'hidden skills' in building the ensemble, such as working with partners, working collaboratively, developing speaking and listening skills and following instructions. Freeze frames, for example, are a powerful strategy that allows collaborative learning and the development of vocabulary whilst simultaneously developing speaking and listening skills. Freeze frames are open ended in that what one child 'sees' may be completely different to what another child sees. My intention in choosing these strategies is to demonstrate how rehearsal room techniques are inclusive of all pupils and can be accessed by pupils with English as an additional language and pupils with special educational needs. ALL pupils participate in the sessions without feeling that the 'spotlight' is on them whilst allowing the pupils to feel empowered.

Through leading in my own class, the wider school and the Associate Schools, I have successfully shown that Shakespeare's work and RSC Rehearsal Room pedagogy invites 'playfulness' into the classroom. 'Play' helps raise attainment.



Future Developments

We want to embed further the rehearsal room techniques. We have recognised that rehearsal room techniques and teaching Shakespeare's plays is part of Archibald's identity. It works and this focus on raising standards in writing in KS1 is something that I would like to share with our Associate Schools.

We will continue to review and fine tune the writing tasks to ensure that they meet the English Teacher Assessment Framework criteria.

EYFS and KS1 will work on the production of *The Tempest*. This year we will include Nursery pupils in the performance.

I am excited to be leading the future of the pupils in my class, supporting staff in the wider school and empowering the staff in the Associate Schools.