



Aspects that support children to learn: An account of practice from collaborative action research in Foundry Lane Primary School

The Research-Practice Partnership

The **School Voices Research-Practice Partnership** aims to support schools in **responding to student diversity** and **improving learning outcomes** for all, whilst at the same time **promoting inclusion**. This will be achieved by focusing on **students' voices and dialogues** between teachers and children and young people through **participatory research approaches**.

The Partnership has been partly funded by **UKRI – Higher Education Innovation Funding (HEIF)**. The Partnership consists of a collaboration between: **University of Southampton** and three **hub schools (St John's Primary and Nursery School, St Mary's CE Primary School, Redbridge Primary School)** that were involved in an earlier pilot study. The hub schools and the University of Southampton support other schools in introducing these ideas through collaborative action research, considering the complexities within each school context. For more information - www.schoolvoices.soton.ac.uk

The school

Foundry Lane Primary School, a founding member of the Southampton Co-operative Learning Trust, is a 3-form entry primary school in Southampton, with 564 pupils. The school's mission is summed up in their motto – 'Working Together', aimed at bringing parents, teachers and students together, in order to foster a strong sense of community.

The school caters to a diverse range of pupils coming from different socio-economic backgrounds and with about 48 different languages being spoken within the community. There are 18 classes in the school from Reception to Year 6 (4- to 11-year-olds), with two classes in Year R, Year 1, and Year 2 and three classes each from Year 3 to Year 6. The school comprises of 28 teaching staff members and 47 support staff members.

The current focus of the school is to address challenges stemming from poor mental health and difficult life situations that pupils face outside of the school.

Research focus and process

The Deputy Head of Foundry Lane Primary School led the research process in the school. The research focus was to understand the experiences of all children in mainstream classes, especially focusing on some children who were previously receiving alternative pathways outside mainstream classes, and to gain insights about what helps children to be successful learners.

To explore this further, the following research questions were developed:

1. **What helps us to be successful learners?**
2. **What resources are there to support children in mainstream classes?**
3. **How is learning adapted for individual children?**

The school chose to adopt the 'students as researchers' approach with six Year 5 students



The Year 5 pupil researchers

becoming 'pupil researchers'. Five out of the six pupil researchers were carrying on from the previous year. Sadly one of the researchers from last year had left the school due to the family moving. The team decided to remain as a group of 5 for the year.



Pupil researchers engaged in discussions using mind-mapping to share ideas

The deputy head and the pupil researchers had a discussion about what helps learners to be successful in learning. They collated different ideas using mind mapping and discussed how all learners are different, with different needs and varied preferred ways of learning.

To further explore the research questions, the pupil researchers created a Google form to find out the thoughts of other learners. As a group they discussed what they thought enables children to learn and came up with a list of things that they wanted to include in the questionnaire. These forms were then shared with teachers, who administered the forms with all pupils of Year 5 and Year 6. The pupil researchers then collated and analysed the outcomes of the Google form survey. They discussed what they found interesting and striking about the data that they gathered.

Based on the findings from the survey, the pupil researchers were interested to find out more about 'friendships' and how they impact children's learning. They invited groups of children from Year 5 and Year 6 for pupil conferencing and talked about the survey questions in more detail.

The pupil researchers also used iPads to capture images of what helps children with their learning, by observing lessons in different classrooms. Prior to observing the lessons, the pupil researchers agreed upon behaviours while carrying out the observations, so that they were being respectful and productive.

Eventually, all the information and findings gathered by the pupil researchers were fed back to the teachers and the senior leadership team.

Participatory methods

Whole class surveys: The survey was designed by the pupil researchers, with support from the deputy head. Google forms were used to design the survey, which was then administered by teachers in all Year 5 and 6 classrooms. The pupil researchers collated and analysed the survey data. An interesting finding reported by the pupil researchers was about

different children's experiences about making friends. Some classes found it really easy to make friends, however some other classes find it quite hard. This was interesting because in the initial meetings, the pupil researchers had discussed how having friends can help children with their learning.



Pupil researchers carrying out pupil conferencing

Pupil conferencing: The pupil researchers had a conversation with a group of children from Year 5 and Year 6 to know more about their responses to the survey questions and gain insights about their experiences. The conferencing involved all the pupil researchers and provided an opportunity for them to follow up on aspects of learning that they had seen in classrooms.



Pupil researchers capturing images during a lesson observation

Photo elicitation and observations: To further explore the different aspects that aid learning in the classroom, the pupil researchers used iPads to capture images during classroom observations. In pairs, the pupil researchers visited Year 5 and Year 6 classrooms. Some examples of images of what helps children to learn include – a peer, concrete apparatus, word banks, inputs from an adult.



Outcomes

Engaging with the experiences of a range of children: With the help of the survey, the observations using iPads and the pupil conferencing, the pupil researchers were able to engage with a variety of children, thereby exploring a range of aspects that help children learn. In the process of doing so, the pupil researchers not only became aware of the diversity amongst their peers, but were also able to reflect on their own learning experiences.

A combination of academic, social and personal aspects: Through the research process, it was found that children feel supported to cope in the mainstream classrooms, with the help of academic, social and personal aspects. Examples of these include teacher modelling, asking questions, working with a partner as well as personalised resources to support learning.

Identifying areas for further work: An interesting aspect that was explored through this research process was 'friendships'. The pupil researchers discussed how having friends helps one to learn. However, through the survey, they found that some children find it quite difficult to make friends in the school. Therefore this area was identified as an aspect that the school needs to develop further and

curate support for children who find it challenging to make friends.

Key ideas emerging

Continued engagement with pupil researchers: The Deputy Head continued working with the same group of pupil researchers (except one), since the previous year. Though the research focus and process was different, the pupil researchers' discussion skills, their confidence to share their ideas, and to critically engage in the research process, grew exponentially over the two years. Having the same individuals being involved – the



Pupil researchers from Year 5 in a discussion with the deputy head

deputy head and the pupil researchers – also ensures consistency and continuity in engaging with students' voices.

Using a range of methods: The pupil researchers used a variety of methods which included a digital questionnaire (Google forms), a visual approach using images captured during lesson observations and a conversational approach through pupil conferencing. These methods were not only carried out in a sequential manner, but were also informed by each other. For example, the finding about difficulty in making friends experienced by some children, shaped the pupil conferences with Year 5 students, to know more about the impact of friendships. Thus, a combination of various complementary methods is helpful in deepening insights about the research focus and developing a more holistic understanding about the children's learning experiences.

Teachers' and Students' thoughts

Actually, when I introduced the whole idea of pupil researchers, the staff were a little bit 'not me'. But this year they've actually asked for them to be included... The staff that weren't involved last year got a better understanding of what it involved and actually realised it. It's not daunting at all. It's involving children in research, which is absolutely crucial.

Deputy Head

I remember before I used to be like really shy sharing my ideas, like I would like barely talk in anything I would do. But as I start doing it more, I finally gained confidence and realised to always be myself and not to be afraid of something that could be really simple.

Pupil researcher

The answer [to survey questions] we found surprising was that some children did not find it easy to make new friends.

Pupil researcher

Teacher team

- Helen Simpson (Deputy Headteacher)

Headteacher: Sean Taylor

Research team

- Professor Kiki Messiou
- Dr Jay de los Reyes
- Chinmaya Potnis
- Ping Dong
- Karen Ibáñez Riquelme

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