

Marked increase in enthusiasm with reluctant readers; boys in particular

HAZELBURY JUNIOR SCHOOL, LONDON

Scale of the challenge

The literacy co-ordinator at Hazelbury Junior School was determined to get reading levels up, after years of various initiatives and efforts to boost parental support.

It was a constant battle to achieve this and foster a love of reading. But Zeenat Hussain knew the battle was worth waging. She had already seen that a focus on writing had boosted SATS results in year five, and these results were unusually outstripping reading results.

This suggested that the writing focus was working, but reading practice needed a boost. The reading results of many pupils were considerably below their chronological age. Zeenat also knew that many were 'de-coding' the text without necessarily comprehending what they were reading.

"In effect, they were reading like little robots," she said. Their knowledge of what they had read was often fairly superficial.

The school was encouraged to use Accelerated Reader through their local Education Action Zone, which covered a cluster of schools in North London. As the main feeder school to the one secondary school, they would have been a key target for improvement.

After seeing other schools "raving about the software", and speaking to staff and pupils about it, Zeenat decided to see what it could do for her school.

Implementation

She started using it with year 5 pupils in September 2005 where the reading results suggested the need for help was greatest, and she was pleased to see quick results. This persuaded the head to invest in more quizzes and books and broaden the exercise to other pupils.

They identified 61 out of 150 pupils whose reading age was up to one year below their chronological reading age. They chose a mixture of reluctant boy and girl readers, who effectively became a control group. They then boosted the stock of books from authors popular with the children. Jacqueline Wilson and Roald Dahl topped the list which also featured a good supply of non-fiction.

Teaching assistants handled the day-to-day work, taking groups of up to six pupils to the library, where suitable books were temptingly displayed, from which pupils chose their own books. As fast as the pupils could read their books, they logged onto the computers, and printed off their improving scores.

Results

Zeenat says there has been a marked increase in enthusiasm. Reluctant readers, boys in particular, have paid far more attention to reading since starting because they know there is a quiz at the end of it.

“They like the tests, which of course we call a quiz, not a test, and because it involves computers, it makes them extra keen”, said Zeenat.

Even pupils not involved in the control test are fired up to get involved. Zeenat says she has a queue of children pestering her to be picked to be included in the exercise, and even parents are asking if their children can get involved.

According to Zeenat, confidence and interest is rising, and she expects far better SATS results in the future on reading levels. She is convinced that reading ages will improve, just as she has seen happen with other schools. “If you practice any skill it gets better”, is her verdict.