

The Power of Pictures

Summary of findings from the research on the
CLPE Power of Pictures Project 2013-19

June 2019



Forward

This project grew out of two of our passions at CLPE. A passion for ensuring every child has access to the best possible literacy teaching and a passion for picturebooks and their importance to all children's developing literacy.

It has been supported throughout its six-year lifespan by many people and organisations in the education, arts and literary worlds and by hundreds of teachers and thousands of students. It has not yet finished growing and developing and this report is only the start of the evidence about the interrelationships between creativity, drawing, writing and publication that we are hoping to share with you. Power of Pictures was selected for evaluation using a randomised control trial by the RSA/EEF as part of their Learning About Culture programme, the results of which will be available in 2020/21. We are proud that Power of Pictures will be part of this evidence base.

In our work over the last six years, we have learnt a great deal and we wanted to share this evidence with a wider audience so that as many children as possible can benefit from deep, meaningful and authentic experiences of literacy learning.

Louise Johns-Shepherd

Chief Executive, Centre for Literacy in Primary Education.

Illustrations ©Viviane Schwarz: *Art is About to Happen.*

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Introduction

The Power of Pictures is a project devised by the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE). The project began in 2013 when CLPE's Charlotte Hacking and author Ed Vere put together a two day course for teachers designed to help teachers use picturebooks, understand the process that goes into developing a picturebook and develop meaningful relationships between authors and schools. With a grant from the Arts Council, Grants for the Arts programme this project evolved into a three year programme the outcomes of which were originally shared at a conference with former Children's Laureate, Chris Riddell in June 2016.

The new Power of Pictures programme incorporated nine two-day courses over a three year period. Each course was led by a different writer/illustrator, assisted by a member of CLPE teaching staff. In each course the author/illustrator demonstrated specific artistic and writing skills and techniques, and modelled creative responses to one of their own titles. Teachers tried these out in the workshops, then in school, and finally returned to report on their experiences to the writer or illustrator. They were supported to use the materials in school by detailed teaching materials written by CLPE, helping them to use the books from Nursery through to Year 6.

To enhance and open out this experience CLPE developed short films of the participating writers and illustrators, in which their creative practices are brought to life. These site-specific films have been devised in close collaboration with the writers and illustrators, and filmed in their workspace or studio. The films form the centrepiece of the

Power of Pictures website, alongside a range of specially developed materials and resources which show teachers how to use books from all the featured artists throughout the primary age range.

The original project was evaluated by Dr Sue Horner and Janet White who attended all the courses, scrutinised the evidence from the teacher evaluations and work from the schools and interviewed the authors. This evaluation evidence was published in an initial report:

<https://clpe.org.uk/powerofpictures/research>

and was used to refine and develop the programme.

Since 2012, CLPE has worked with 268 schools and eleven author illustrators to design and implement the programme and gather evidence about what works and how it works.

This report shares the evidence collected from teachers and children on the CLPE Power of Pictures projects run in the years from 2013-19, sharing a summary of CLPE's findings about the impact of the work on teachers and children during this time and our recommendations for sharing the work more widely.

In 2018 the Power of Pictures was accepted as one of the five cultural learning activities in the RSA/EEF *Learning About Culture* randomised control trials to build an evidence base for cultural learning. The results of all the *Learning About Culture* trials will be published by the RSA and the EEF in 2020/2021 and will contribute to the EEF Toolkit of Research, which allows school leaders to see how much additional progress these projects help students make, how much they cost per pupil and how reliable the evidence is.

What is the Power of Pictures Programme?

Teachers learn about the craft of picturebook making by working directly with a published children's author/illustrator and teacher trainer across the course of two and a half days. To begin each course, CLPE teaching staff and each author-illustrator team-teach a whole day session for 20 teachers, looking at the author's work. They investigate the writer's creative process, analyse their images, and explore the relationship between picture and text. The teachers are given teaching sequences and a copy of the book in their hands and are shown during the first day how to implement this immediately in their classrooms to enable them to focus on developing children's creative writing. At the end of the first day, teachers are invited to consider how they will disseminate the work more widely in their schools.

On returning to school they are asked to deliver the teaching sequence in their literacy lessons and collect evidence of children's work and analyse the impact on their children's engagement and attainment. When back at school teachers can draw upon a wealth of online resources and filmed interviews with the author-illustrators as well as teaching sequences for all key stages and examples of practice from other schools.

The children in the class then work with the author-illustrator for half a day. The author supports the children to understand their role as an author, their own creative processes and leads activities that support their understanding of the processes involved in creating a picturebook.

Teachers return for a second training day following the children's author visit and they receive further training from the author and the teacher trainer on developing character and shaping their own narrative, focussed on the interplay between words and pictures. The teachers finish by creating spreads for their own picturebook and, having done this to reflect on implications for classroom practice in their own settings. They are then tasked with implementing the programme in its fullest sense and teaching each pupil to create their own picturebook.

Teachers return for a follow-up workshop six weeks later, during which they share their experiences, the outcomes of their work and the impact of the work on the children in their class. They evaluate the key learning and successes of the work and look at how this could make impact on their overall curriculum in the long term.

The schools all have access to the resources on the Power of Pictures website and can therefore extend children's learning by showing and studying the work of other illustrators as well as disseminating the practice and ideas across the school, as well as building key approaches into other areas of the curriculum to enhance learning.



The Power of Pictures – Summary of Findings

Picturebooks are an important genre of children’s literature and support the development of sophisticated reading skills.

Picturebooks are an important genre of children’s literature and not just a step on the route to chapter books. They support the development of sophisticated reading skills, enabling children to develop deep comprehension skills and to learn about narrative structure and character development in an accessible way.

Giving time and space for children to read, respond to and discuss the themes and structures of different picturebooks provides children with a strong understanding of how to construct a compelling narrative in an accessible way, including characterisation, setting, plot, creating empathy, pacing and structure.

At the start of each course, picturebooks were viewed by many teachers and children as a route into reading longer and more challenging books, rather than as a challenging form of reading in themselves.

As teachers’ subject knowledge about the potential of picturebooks for more experienced readers developed, teachers were able to see how reading them benefited children’s comprehension and composition across the primary years. The teachers on the project planned for their classes to have increased opportunities for using

picturebooks more widely to develop pupils’ language and vocabulary, comprehension and ideas for composition.

The project training sessions focussed on developing teachers’ subject knowledge in how to read illustrations and supported teachers to plan to develop children’s understanding of how words and pictures are used together to communicate meaning. This helped them to pass this learning on to children, developing deeper comprehension skills and allowing them additional opportunities to infer, deduce, think critically, empathise and make personal connections within and across texts and real life experiences.

In our increasingly visual world, the skill of analysing and interpreting images is even more essential for children. Picturebooks are an incredibly useful resource for teaching these skills at an early age and benefiting children’s understanding in a wider context, allowing them to navigate their way successfully in an increasingly visual world, for example understanding the ways in which words and pictures are used in news stories and social media and how these can be biased or misleading.



Teachers' changing perceptions of picturebooks:

*"Before doing this project, I wouldn't have chosen to use this book with a Year 5 class, but **I can now see how much deep thinking it provided opportunities for, in terms of inference, character development and vocabulary.**"*

*"I had never really considered reading and working with a picturebook at the level I teach (Y5), thinking it would be 'too easy' or not engaging enough as a model for writing. How things changed! A small group of children were a little suspicious (they thought it might be 'for babies') but in fact, they very quickly came around and were amongst the most insightful as **the class began to notice the subtle, deeper layers to the text.**"*

*"This has totally changed my attitude in using picture books with my Year 6 children. Before, if I had seen one of them pick up a picture book, I would have said "Put that down and choose a proper book." **Now I can see the value of using them in my planning and for developing children's reading and writing.**"*

Project Teachers 2013-19

Teachers' experience of using picturebooks more widely to develop pupils' language and vocabulary, developing deeper comprehension skills and understanding the interrelationship between words and pictures:

*"From a teaching point of view, **picture books elicit deeper and more thought-provoking responses from children** as they are able to draw on the 'extra' story depicted through the pictures. This creates more talk, which in turn promotes ideas for writing. **Children who would normally be considered less able have shone using the Power of Pictures sequences.**" Project Teacher, Year 1*

"I can see the benefits of using picturebooks with older children. It has surprised me how unfamiliar the children were with looking at pictures in greater depth, really reading what is going on in a picture and being able to explain how they know this. Although the children were not confident at first, the discussions really developed and I saw an improvement in understanding and use of vocabulary." Project Teacher, Year 5

The impact of children understanding about analysing, interpreting and authorial intent:

*All the children in my class discuss illustrations with confidence, making references to a range of authors/illustrators and discussing connections that they are able to make between them. **They are becoming aware of how techniques are used by the illustrator to create a certain effect.**'*

Project Teacher, Y1

*"The most surprising thing is that it has given our children a voice and a language. The developing understanding of how picturebooks work and how illustrators actively make decisions has led to children digging much more deeply into the story. The increasing understanding that the illustrator is an author has led to in-depth discussions around authorial intent. **Pupils increased confidence in expressing understanding and a willingness to challenge ideas has impacted in ways we did not imagine.** They have an increasing vocabulary and language to share their ideas."*

Project Headteacher

Children need time, space and planned opportunities to develop their ideas for truly creative and independent writing.

When teachers are supported to understand and implement the interrelated stages of an authentic writing process, similar to one that a published author undertakes, children's independent writing is of greater depth and higher quality.

The project advocates a clear model for the teaching of writing that allowed children to be supported as independent writers in a way that is built around the real processes of practising writers.

The process leads them from ideation before beginning writing, through providing opportunities for reading, thinking, discussing, drawing and note making before embarking on the creation of a text. Plenty of opportunity is built in for genuine reflection and feedback on the content of the writing before the piece is finally published.

Working with a variety of authors and illustrators on the project and seeing the ways in which a practicing writer works has enabled us to develop a model for writing which shows the significant stages of this authentic process.

Tensions and issues around the curriculum and current assessment frameworks for writing and teachers' confidence in allowing children to have choice and voice in their writing have, however, been identified as a potential barrier towards this way of working. Many teachers on the project cited 'National Curriculum requirements' and 'expectations for assessment' as barriers, but they were also aware that the way of writing the project advocates leads to much more original and independent outcomes than those currently being produced in the classroom. There is continued evidence across the years of the project that there is a perception amongst some teachers that the ways in which writing is being described and promoted in the current education system is at odds with a more creative approach to writing.

Children benefit from the opportunities, time and space to form their ideas prior to and during writing.

During the sessions the teachers engaged in an activity where they wrote their own independent narrative. This allowed them to see this process through the eyes of the children, thinking the way an independent writer thinks and feeling the way an independent writer feels. In this way, they were able to understand the complexity of the writing process and consider how far removed classroom writing can be from truly independent creative writing.

Giving time and space for children to come up with ideas for their own writing before creating texts is an essential part of the writing process. The teaching resources provided by the project guided teachers to plan for a range of experiences to help children explore and shape their ideas.



These included:

- Reading a range of picturebooks, exploring story themes, characters, settings, shapes, structures, patterns and pacing, comparing these to other narratives they have seen or read in film texts, stories and novels
- Engaging in discussions around texts that focus on the impact these make on a reader and identifying techniques that could be used in their own writing
- Time to think, visualise and imagine
- Engaging in drama; improvising and exploring story ideas
- Exploring and developing ideas through drawing, doodling, note taking and writing
- Discussing ideas with others in a supportive writing community.

Teachers' perceptions of the barriers created by current systems:

*"Writing needs to be accessible and fun and **the way we teach it should mirror the way most authors work** - drafting, editing, discussing, designing, building, creating, making mistakes, fixing them etc... that's not really outlined in the NC."*

*"We need to focus more on creativity, less on spelling, grammar etc. BUT the curriculum is a huge barrier for this. **The expectations in the National Curriculum make it hard to give children the freedom to be creative** – but they have enjoyed this work so much and have come up with much more original pieces of writing this way."*

Project Teachers 2013-19

The importance of teacher subject knowledge about the structure of an authentic writing process:

*"**My teaching of story structure and ideation has improved and I feel better placed to guide children through the whole writing process to produce better texts.** The children are proud of their work, inspired, more confident in their ideation and creation. They are thinking from the mindset of an author." **Project Teacher, Year 5***

*I think what makes a difference is that I've really enjoyed it; the book, working with Ed (Vere) and **actually developing a sequence of writing that takes them through the stages that take them from the art to planning, developing and publishing their own writing.** All my children have gained something from this work from my most able to those with the lowest levels of language and those that are new to English – it's been brilliant! **Project Teacher, Year 1***

*"**We've seen a huge impact on the children's understanding of story structure** and them being able to use the same level of detail throughout their story, rather than in traditional writing where the introduction and beginning have a lot of detail and then the rest tails off." **Project Teacher, Year 5***

Teachers' increased understanding of the Importance of Ideation:

*"It's helped me appreciate the importance and difficulty of the writing process. It has changed my perception of editing, i.e. that this is part of the creation process. It has also helped me understand lots of the difficulties that children have; namely generating ideas, considering audience, understanding the structure of writing. More time needs to be given to the ideation process and support with structuring texts. Children just need time to produce quality." **Project Teacher, Year 5***

*'Children are talking more - about pictures, characters, settings - they are able to empathise and show this through their writing. They are motivated to write and don't struggle with 'ideas' as much." **Project Teacher, Year 4***

*"The children seem to have grown in confidence through the writing process. Some who regularly get confused and stuck now find that time and strategies for ideation are freeing up their ideas, giving them time to imagine, to try out ideas and then structure separately. It has also changed their approach to writing longer texts and the way they approach composing a sentence with far more focus on meaning." **Project Teacher, Year 5***

When children are given opportunities to draw as part of the writing process this helps them to formulate, develop and extend ideas for writing; making their independent, self-initiated writing richer.

Teachers were supported to use drawing as a way in to the planning of stories by working with professional illustrators who use this as their process. They were able to transfer this practice into their planning of classroom work and children were given the opportunities to engage in drawing before and alongside their writing. This opportunity to draw alongside writing supported children in planning, developing and extending ideas and in constructing multimodal texts of their own.

When the pedagogy of teaching writing demonstrates that writing is a creative process and rough and draft work are essential to producing quality outcomes, children are more engaged in the process as well as the outcomes.

The professional authors who co-taught sessions on the project modelled their processes of drafting and refining ideas and showed children and teachers how this made a difference to their work. This helped the children to understand that published writing is refined and developed over time before it reaches publication. Teachers were supported to give time and plan experiences which allowed children to shape and change their ideas as they worked and in a way that made sense to them. This led to children improving the content of their writing as their ideas progressed.

If children have opportunities to work in a supportive writing community, learning how writing works from published authors and responding to each other's

work as readers and writers, this supports their developing identity as writers.

Teachers learnt from authors about the processes used in the professional production of a picturebook and children understood the purpose and audience of their writing from the outset. This meant that the focus of the task was on whether or not the writing and the form it will be published in met its original intention. First responses to writing, including marking focussed on children developing the content of their writing, ensuring the writing is as strong as it can be before secretarial skills such as spelling and punctuation were corrected at the publication stage.

Teachers noticed the shift in their own understanding of children's ability to write a story narrative independently when they changed their first response focus to the content of the writing, rather than picking up on specific assessment foci or secretarial skills.

Teaching children the skills of responding to their own writing as well as acting as editor or response partners for others increased their self-efficacy and stamina as writers. They were much better prepared to persevere and support themselves and others to overcome challenges when writing independently.

The children were provided with opportunities to publish their finished work in a way that reflects real-life writing and this allowed them to see the purpose of writing and gain a sense of pride in their achievements.

Teachers' perceptions of the impact of drawing before and during writing:

"Drawing helps **feed the children's imagination and helps them to organise their thoughts**. They may become aware of **additional details they had not thought about before**" Project Teacher, Year 3

"Drawing gives children **time to think and visualise characters and settings**. This helps prepare them for writing. When they do come to write they have **more ideas and better vocabulary** as they have spent a lot of time **thinking and processing their ideas**." Project Teacher, Year 4

"Drawing the characters **opened a door to getting to know them deeply and enabled the children to write with ease**" Project Teacher, Year 1

"It has shown me how children can **produce more thought-provoking writing when drawing**. It helps them to idealise a better structure and use stronger vocabulary." Project Teacher, Year 5

Teacher's reflections on improving the way in which writing is taught:

"I've learnt the importance of giving them time and reinforcing the idea that it doesn't have to be **polished from the start**. It's a work in progress. I'm building in partner work to discuss ideas and give suggestions and allowing them to choose words or images to record ideas and giving them enough time and freedom to plan." Project Teacher, Year 5

"The children have gained so much from creating their own picturebooks. They were given the freedom to create their own setting and their own characters and then their own plot line. **The children were allowed to be imaginative and creative**. Alongside this, they were able to see what it meant to be an author/illustrator and began to use the technical terms associated with the role. For the **project they became illustrators and authors** - something which they were extremely proud of."

Project Teacher, Year 5

The impact on children's self-efficacy:

"I have seen the children's listening and communication skills improve. They are motivating each other, evaluating and helping each other improve or make their ideas clearer for the end result.

Their sense of achievement has been marked. **All the children commented on how they are so glad they didn't give up when they felt challenged**." Project Teacher, Year 5



“I see children arrive in primary education expressing themselves freely and intuitively through drawing. Expressing themselves in ways they can’t yet verbally.

They’re also able to understand sophisticated feelings and emotions when they “read” a picture that they don’t yet have the vocabulary for. Yet, when they leave at 11, pictures are out of the equation and too many feel unconfident about drawing. They’ve somehow learnt that there’s a right way to draw, and a wrong way. There isn’t. The only thing that matters is that you do it and you express yourself through it. It’s an incredibly valuable resource that they’re losing.”

Ed Vere



“I understand children who find writing hard. When I get stuck I draw something and I use that as an aid to write about it. I have to see something first in order to tell its story; ***I think stories can grow out of the visual.*** It can be an engine for literacy.”

Chris Riddell

“There’s not enough understanding of the sophistication of children’s books. If we don’t understand that, then we don’t understand how sophisticated children are and they are ***amazingly sophisticated and they think very deeply and powerfully about things.*** And we do them a disservice if we don’t see that.”

Lauren Child

“I witnessed at first hand the power of starting the writing process by drawing. That may sound strange to some, but ***children who had previously struggled to transfer an idea in their heads on to paper grew in confidence as their ideas took shape on the page. Using words and pictures*** with a greater understanding of how the two can work together is when the ***magic starts to happen.***”

Tim Hopgood



Participating Illustrators

Alexis Deacon

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Tim Hopgood

Benji Davies

Mini Grey

Chris Haughton

Emily Hughes

David Lucas

Tom McLaughlin

Ed Vere

Partner Publishers:

Andersen Press

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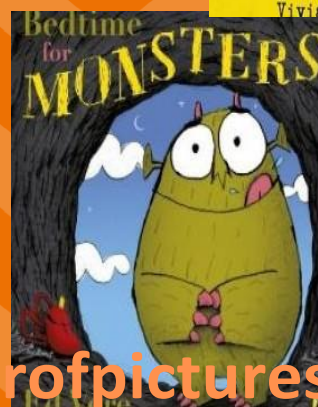
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