



How can we Promote Boys Achievements in Literacy

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Achievement in Literacy

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BA in Childhood Development

I would like to thank the staff and pupils within my setting for all their help and support.

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Declaration

I hereby confirm that the content of this research report is my own research, observations, thoughts and conclusions.

Signed MA Mulvey

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Introduction

The area I have chosen to look at for my research project is in relation to boys and how we can help them to be better achievers in relation to literacy and reading. I selected this area to study in support of my settings Improvement plan. They have made it a priority for this year's agenda to help boys in their achievements in relation to literacy and numeracy (see Appendix 2).

Rationale

There have been many reports about how boys are continually under achieving when it comes to reading and writing. In this report I wanted to study the many aspects that could have a bearing on why boys have difficulty in this area of learning. The report sets out to look at influences such as parental attitude, for example could a parent's own educational ability set the expectations for their child's ability. This included interviewing the parents of my focus group to see what activities the children engage in at home in relation to literacy and reading. The focus group consists of five boys who were identified as low achievers when in reception class. My evidence includes samples of writing collected between weeks two and the final week of my research. In observing the group, my study intends to investigate additional factors such as behaviour, learning environment and brain development e.g. are they ready to tackle activities in this area. Through discussion with each boy, I gained a better understanding of what they like doing when they come to school.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introduction

This literacy review looks at articles to see whether boy's achievements and their behaviour are related. I will consider such aspects as boy's behaviour within their environment and if a child's parental educational ability have an effect on their child's ability to read and write. Does the use of computers and television have an effect on boy's achievements? Can all these be brought together to help boys become better achievers as they work their way through school.

Achievement

A lot has been reported recently about how boys in general are underachievers in relation to literacy. Moss (2000) suggests that there is a difference between the level of reading for boys and girls and that this "discrepancy" starts when children are in Key Stage 1 and is more pronounced as the boys grow older. Pugh and Duffy (2010:156) also suggest that "some boys do underachieve in terms of basic literacy" but they also felt that it mainly related to "working class boys who are underachieving"

Behaviour

There is also some indication that a child's behaviour can be linked to their lack of academic achievement and how they are perceived by teachers. Papatheodorou (2005:61) suggests that

"often, with shy and withdrawn children who try not to be exposed, there is a danger that their progress is overlooked and their abilities underestimated."

It has been suggested by Hofferth (2010) that the use of different media can also

have an impact on a child's behaviour. Hofferth (2010) reports on the

“changes in the past decade in the utilization of computers, video games and TV in comparison with other activities among children in middle childhood”.

The most challenging behaviours that teachers have to deal with in today's classrooms are emotional and behaviour disorders as Lassen et al (2006) investigated in relation to Positive Behavioural Support. We need to find out what causes these children to suffer from the disorders to help them feel confident and able to do the schoolwork. The use of computers and television in today's society can have a good and bad affect on children's behaviour, some parents feel it is alright for their child to play games on their computers and x-boxes which are over 18. These games have more violence in them and can have an effect on a younger child as they may not comprehend what is happening on screen. Children who are playing age appropriate games have a good understanding of them and get more out of them, they are less aggressive and more willing to join in with others.

Parental Education Ability

A study was carried out in Germany by Steinmayr, Dinger and Spinath (2010) to see if there was any association between a child's social background and their scholastic achievement. A child's personality and characteristic can also be related to their social background. Steinmayr et al mentions that

“better-educated parents could have higher demands of academic effort from their children, and these children, in turn, put more effort in their school-work.”

A parent's involvement in their child's education could be a defining factor in how their child improves. In relation to homework a study by Pezdek, Berry and Renno (2002) in America looked at a parent's perception and their involvement in their child's homework which was mainly mathematics related. A parent's perception of

their child's ability seemed to be misconstrued as they appeared to be happy with their child's achievements. Pezdek et al suggested that

“the major vehicle through which parents help their children with school subjects is homework”

I know within my setting that this is an issue as very few children hand in homework, especially boys, and therefore this could be affecting their achievements. The main area of homework in year one is a parent reading with their child. From the chart later on you can see how involved the parents of my focus group have been with their child's reading.

Report Reviews

Most of the recent research papers relate to the achievements of boys and their behaviour have been mainly carried out in America using mixed raced children from different socio-economic backgrounds. The reports have also only been written or researched since the early 1990's when it was first noted that boy's were falling behind girls. Although between the 1970/1980's Jones and Myhill (2004) said

“the same link between gender and achievement was used to explain the underachievement of girls, especially with regard to mathematics and science.”

Ofsted inspections and SATS results have highlighted that the underachievement of boys is related more to their failings in reading, writing, speaking and listening. Since Ofsted highlighted the need to promote boys achievements in reading, writing and speaking and listening in the late 1990's, there have been research projects carried out such as the “Raising Boys Achievements Project” by Younger & Warrington (2004) in relation to implementing strategies to help boys achieve within British schools.

Moss (2000) and Younger and Warrington (2003) suggest that the use of different reading materials to sustain boys interests should be looked at within school settings. Boys read fewer books within school but were more interested in collecting cards. Sharing them and talking about them with their peers made them feel more macho.

Jones & Myhill (2004) have worked within a framework which has highlighted “the link between achievement and gender is one that is frequently used to account for boys’ underachievement” Cowley (2006:121) suggest that when children start school they can find it a scary and confusing place

“that they might be naughty. In an attempt to test what is acceptable behaviour in this strange, new situation, children may ‘act out’ in undesirable ways.”

From this I find that there are pre-conceived ideas for boys to underachieve before they have completed their first year within a school setting.

Boy’s Development and Learning

Miller, Cable and Devereux ((2005:197) together with Featherstone and Bayley (2010) propose that boys are underachievers because of the culture they live within and their brain development. Miller et al

“emphasised in the 1990’s that an individual’s literacy knowledge and competence differ according to the social and cultural context in which they are learnt”.

Featherstone and Bayley (2010:16) indicate that

“the left side of the brain develops more slowly in boys and the necessary links between the hemispheres to facilitate reading often don’t develop until boys are between six and eight”.

Could we as teachers, parents and multi disciplinary agencies be expecting too much from boys at an early age in relation to reading and literacy activities.

Strategies

All these factors need to be considered when looking at how we can help boys by building their confidence in their own ability in activities such as reading, writing, speaking and listening. Do we need to change the way we are presenting these activities to the children within the school environment. In the final Research Report by Younger, Warrington et al they felt that to help boys enjoy reading

“the priority should be to raise the profile of reading as a pleasurable activity in school rather than focus on reading practices at home”

Rather than the children being subjected to a guided read, they should be encouraged to read on their own for 5/10 minutes per day. This gives the opportunity to understand both what they choose to read and how they interpret it. Through an open discussion, the children would have a chance to describe what they got out of the reading and whether or not they enjoyed it. This could be one strategy used to encourage reading within the class environment not only for boys but also some girls who are not particularly keen to read at this age. Encouraging more male role models may also be a factor to consider by asking male family members to come in and possibly read or talk about their interests or what they like to read.

Chapter 3

Research Question

There has been much debate over the years in relation to boys and their lack of achievement especially in relation to literacy and reading.

Research has been carried out in many areas to see if there is a cause and effect as to whether a boy's parent's educational ability has an impact on how they perceive learning within a school environment. Have parents got high or low expectations of their child's ability. Does the environment in which they are learning have an effect on their achievements or does it help them calm down and be motivated to learn.

My main research question "How can we collaborate with parents to motivate boys to raise achievements in Literacy and Reading" came about as I felt that teachers and parents needed to work together to help their child.

My sub questions are in relation to the creative curriculum we are using within my school setting. Does the support they receive from the ladies who come in voluntarily have an impact on their ability to read and write? Is the collective approach from both parents and teachers having an effect on the boy's achievements and if so in what way? My sub questions are as follows:

1. What improvements have been made within the creative curriculum to improve boy's achievements in literacy and reading?
2. What is the impact of additional support in reading for boys in terms of improved ability and motivation for classroom tasks and does the environment have an impact on their learning?
3. What is the effect on boy's achievements when there is collective participation between parents and school staff.

Chapter 4

Investigative Design

At the start of my research, I intended to use action research to help find strategies to help the boys in year one to become achievers. To become confident in their own ability and if successful, a strategy that could be used within other year groups. I intended working with all the boys in both year one classes, of which there are 28 altogether. On monitoring these boys within the first week there were already some boys in each class who were high achievers. I then discussed with the special needs staff to see if they could identify boys who were underachievers within this year group as they had monitored them in reception class. They provided details of nine boys. I monitored these boys for a number of days to see who would be suitable for my research. I then chose to monitor three boys from each class. The remaining three children not chosen were on the special needs register. These children would have been out of the class on many of the occasions I would be observing. This gave me a small focus group of six children to work with.

Unfortunately on asking parent's permission only five of the six boy's parents were willing to let their child be part of my research group. I understand there were issues at home and that is why the sixth child chosen was unable to join my group. I then felt that this was not enough children with which to work with to carry out action research to be able to make any impact in relation to literacy and reading strategies. This also meant that there would not be enough evidence or data collected within the time scale, I had chosen to carry out the action research over five weeks, to give a true reflection of children's abilities. Therefore because of the nature of my data collection and small selection of boys I decided that a case study was a more appropriate approach. I made arrangements to interview each of the mothers of the children in my focus group (see appendix 3). I also decided to observe the children in relation to speaking and listening whilst they were on the carpet at the start of some of the sessions.

The data and evidence collection is more in relation to qualitative as it is the children's written work that I am looking at to see if they have improved their writing ability over the first five weeks within year one. In relation to their speaking and listening skills this is through observation and is more qualitative research data. Their reading ability is also being monitored to see if they have made improvement there but I have also used the data from when they left reception to see if there has been any improved reading ability. My approach therefore is more qualitative than quantitative due to the very nature of the evidence I am collecting. There are no numbers involved in reading, writing or speaking and listening that would support this research approach.

My dominant area of research would therefore be the Case Study approach as I have spoken with the majority of the parents of the boys in my focus group to get some details of their home life, and likes/dislikes in relation to coming to school. I spoke with the mothers of child A, B and D to ask questions in relation to literacy and reading activities at home I set the same questions for each parent when I interviewed them.(see appendix 4)

I have spoken to the reception teachers in relation to child C and E to see if they could provide me with information in relation to their home and family unit. I enclose case notes in relation to each child (see appendices 5-9) Finally, I also interviewed the children as to what they liked to do within school (see appendix 10).

I had a discussion with the literacy co-ordinator (see appendix 11) to see if there was any change in the curriculum she was still looking at the information received to see how this could be implemented within our setting.

I did not go down the route of doing a questionnaire as the Deputy Head implied that the school as a whole would be carrying out a questionnaire in relation to several areas of the curriculum. To date this questionnaire has not been sent. I tried collecting data in connection with my sub-questions. I therefore spoke with the lady who comes in voluntary to hear the children read to see how she felt her support helped the children in their reading (see appendix 12).

The observations I undertook for the speaking and listening part was in relation to the sub-question on the curriculum to see if there was any way prolonged periods on the carpet for children could be shortened to help them get the best out of their school day. Many children, not just the ones I observed got restless after about 10/15 minutes on the carpet for the teachers introduction or plenary.

Chapter 5

Implementation

I spoke with the Deputy Head in relation to the letter I wished to send inviting children to be involved in my project (see appendix 13). Parents of five out of the six children had replied agreeing to their child being involved. One of the parents had declined that their child be involved due to issues at home. I decided to collect data by observing the 5 children during their time on the carpet to see how much interaction there was with speaking and listening.

As part of my job I work with children of varying ability. Normally I alternate with the Teaching Assistant in the other class to do Literacy or Numeracy. However to aid my research I have been working with the children on all literacy based activities over the last five weeks. The groups I work with did not always include the children that I was monitoring for my research in relation to the literacy activities but I was able to monitor them in the role play area (see appendix 14) on an afternoon when it was their time to choose what they wanted to do.

One of the children I had chosen as part of my group has also been absent at least one day in every week since the start of the school term. There are therefore some aspects of this child's involvement in speaking and listening activities or writing activities that are not noted.

I had hoped to monitor how much time the children in my focus group spent in different areas within the classroom but due to me being timetabled for activities I was unable to carry this out.

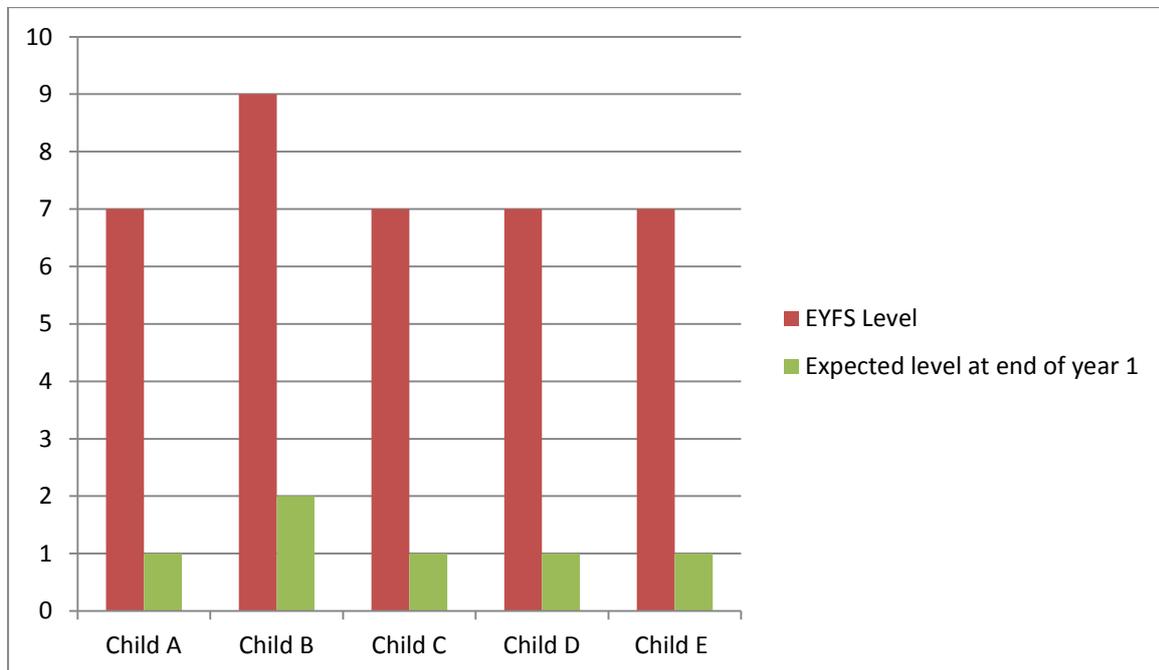
Chapter 6

Findings

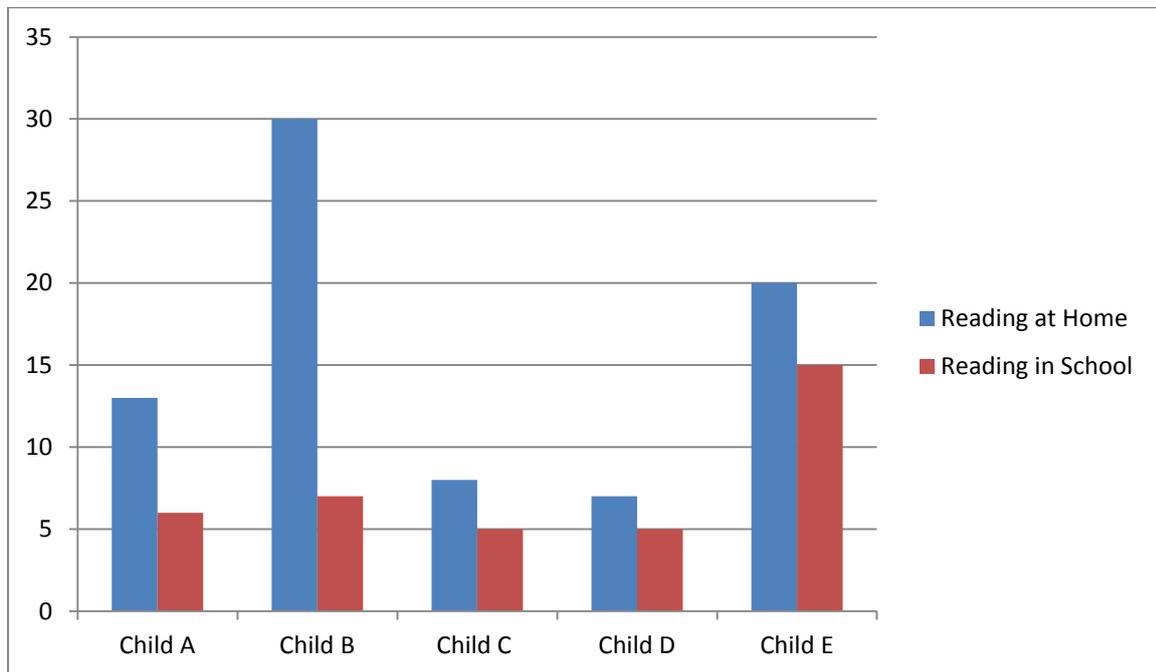
Of the children within the case study four out of the five came from what could be described as a stable home environment. Two were the only children within the family unit and got a lot of support from their parents and family members especially in reading.

Reading

When the children arrived in year one they were all working towards a level 1c in reading. Only one child has attained this level at the moment. Four of the children are classed as being on a scale of P8 which meant they were almost achieving the age related expectations as guided within the Early Years Foundation Strategy. Unfortunately this cannot be shown in comparison with the National Curriculum Strategy levels as they do not marry up and show any improvement. (see Chart)



This chart shows that the children were proficient readers in reception but have fallen behind in year 1. This is only due to the way in which reading is monitored under the National Curriculum and Early Years Foundation Stage.



This chart shows the total number of times the children have read over the last five week period at home and school. (see Appendix 15 for breakdown)

The amount of time a child spends reading whether at home or in school helps improve a child's use of language. If they have the basic knowledge of sounding out and blending helps the structure and pronunciation.

Child A, B and E had a lot of support at home from the parents who help them with their reading and this is reflected in their writing ability.

Writing

At the start of my research I took a sample of the boys writing unfortunately this was scribed by the teacher (see appendix 16). I took some samples of them writing

independently over a few weeks (see appendix 17-21). When the children were able to sound out the words they were trying to write and they understood the pronunciation they were able to write the word properly or if not all of the word, they did manage to get some of the letters in the right order.

Speaking and Listening

For this I observed the children whilst sitting on the carpet to see how much they interacted with the teacher and other children during this time (approximately 20 minutes at the start of each session). I started using a form I had drawn up for this activity but felt it was too restrictive and did not give enough information.

From my observations (see appendix 22-31) I feel that a session of 20 minutes is too long for these children. They find it hard to concentrate after the initial 10 minutes unless it is an activity that the children can be physically involved in. The learning styles of the children could also be a factor that needs to be taken into consideration when preparing for these sessions to help keep the child's attention on task. Child A, B and C come across as being Kinaesthetic learners. Child D and E are auditory and visual learners.

During my research the teachers carried out assessments of all the children in relation to reading and writing. As part of the school's improvement plan they were trying to see if they could predict what the children would score at a later stage within the school setting ie end of Key Stage 1 or Key Stage 2. Unfortunately it was too early within the school year to have enough evidence to predict scores for children at a later stage of their school life.

The children in my focus group were quite unpredictable as on one day they would be reading and writing with enthusiasm yet on other days they would feel that it was a chore. Child A certainly needed, on many occasions, to be encouraged to write. Within the writing tasks he tended to look around and lose concentration. Child B and C rushed their work so that they would have more time to play. Despite encouraging them to take their time and work neatly they were still one of the first finished. Child D worked well took his time and concentrated hard. Child E tried hard with his writing and reading but he is not a confident child in his own ability and needed additional encouragement to convince him that he could do these activities.

I observed the children whilst being involved in afternoon activities such as the role play area where there is plenty of opportunity for speaking and listening.

On speaking with the reading ladies they felt that all children had a good knowledge of what they were reading. Some of them were still at the sounding out stage and some of them were improving as the more they read the more confident they got their own ability.

Chapter 7

Discussion of Findings

My research question related to working with parents and collaborating together to help the boy's within my focus group become better achievers. The staff within the school work well together noting anything that comes to light in view of the boy's ability and attitude to their learning. The Deputy Head and the teachers all work together to provide a suitable curriculum which is within the abilities of the children within year one. Parents are informed if there are any issues arising concerning their child and strategies are put in place to help them which both staff and parents work together on. As a school we like to involve parents in their child's learning but it is possible that due to family and work commitments not many parents are as involved as they would like to be. It may be that we need to think of other ways to involve parents at a time that suits them and their commitments.

By the time many children reach year one they are no longer shy or withdrawn. They know the daily routine with the only difference being a different teacher and support staff. They are therefore more confident in some aspects of their school life. Many children use computers and watch television at home and this helps their learning as they are seeing written words and letters which could be retained to memory, bearing in mind that their cognitive development has reached that age appropriate stage.

Parents of the children within my focus group came across as being well educated and had a good knowledge of what was expected of their child at school. They all had some involvement with their child's school work particularly in relation to the reading aspect as this is the major homework activity for children in year one.

Some boy's behaviour may have an impact on their learning but this I feel may be due to the environment they are in. If they have a wide open space in which to run around and become boisterous they will do so. Within year one there is little space to run around and there are many areas to explore. They still have the opportunity to run around and be boisterous when playing out at the appropriate break times. This has helped them calm down and become more involved in activities.

The behaviour of child C within reception was an issue which his parents and teacher tried to address by working together on strategies. So far, in his time within year one he has shown no behavioural difficulties.

According to research a boy's brain development can be slower in contrast to girls for subjects such as reading and writing. It may also be that their fine motor skills are not fully developed therefore they find it difficult to hold the pencil in a comfortable manner for them. They may come across as low achievers in reception and year one but by the time they have reached year two their brain will have become more developed. Their understanding will have awakened in areas of reading and writing. It is then that the boys find everything has slotted into place and they are capable of what is expected of them.

Chapter 8

Implications

Most of the research into boys and their achievements had been carried out either in upper primary school or within secondary school settings. There has been little carried out within the year one age group. This age group are still developing many of their skills in relation to reading, writing, speaking and listening. The cultural differences we have within our settings could have an effect as some cultures are more driven when it comes to being academic and push their children to become great achievers from an early age. Certain parents from different backgrounds and cultures send their child to school in the hope that the teachers will teach them all they need to know and therefore do little or no work with their child at home. These are the children that are possibly falling behind when it comes to reading, writing, speaking and listening. These children could be encouraged to attend after school clubs to help build their self esteem and confidence, to help them see that school can be a fun place to learn social skills and not just be an education establishment. As educators we need to work out strategies to help get parents more involved with their child's learning. The parents who have poor social and communication skills may benefit from attending some life skill classes with their child. If the child feels that their parents are supportive and come into school on a regular basis this may help build better family relations between the child and their parent.

More male role models could be used to support the strategy for reading, encouraging children to read all kinds of different media. Using blogging as a way of keeping parents up to date with what is happening within the school environment and encouraging children and parents to get involved. Blogging is a big activity that is happening within our school with children from year three upwards. To help parents get involved we could run a class to show parents how it works and what sort of items can be shown.

Encouraging children to take their time when engaged in literacy activities, noting whether they are forming their letters correctly ensuring that they do not feel they have failed because they have written them the wrong way as this may make them feel less confident to write anything again. The topic of boys and their achievements needs to be carried out over a greater period of time, say possibly from the start to the end of a school year to get the full impact of how boys are achieving and to see if there is any reasons as to why they may not achieve. Parents need to inform teachers of any issues at home that may have a detrimental effect on the boy's achievements.

We need to encourage more of the male population to be involved in their child's education even if it is only reading a story with them at bedtime this would give the boy an indication that it is okay for you to read books. Many boys feel that it is not good for their street credibility to be seen as reading books as other boys may make fun of them. Many boys look to footballers as role models. They assume such a "career" would not involve the need to develop the skills of reading and writing. The setting already utilises the local premiership team's community programmes via football academies. We could get the footballers to teach/encourage boys to continue with their reading and writing through all school life.

More boy orientated activities other than football could help improve boy's achievements. Asking the boys themselves what activities they would like to participate in whilst at school in relation to the school curriculum. Could it be that we are not asking the boys what their interest are to engage them and support their learning style especially if they are kinaesthetic learners.

Within this last year there has been an improvement in pupils leaving primary school with a better grasp of 'three Rs' according to the Government data (cited by Sellgren 2011)

“Official data shows 67% of 11-year olds gained at least a level 4, the expected level, in these subjects in national curriculum tests, known as Sats.”

Unfortunately it does not say how many were boys or girls. The School Minister Nick Gibb stated that

“We are determined to raise standards of reading. There will always be some children for whom reading is a struggle. However, we can and must do much better for the one in 10 boys who at the age of 11 can read no better than a seven-year-old” cited by Sellgren (2011)

We need to encourage boys to be involved more in reading activities and monitor their reading age to help them improve their ability.

Chapter 9

Conclusions

Although my research was over a short period of time I can see that there is some improvement in the boy's behaviour, in that they are less boisterous when playing. Their understanding of what they are writing has shown an improvement when they are working independently. The parental support that children have at home for their reading has given the boys confidence in reading at school. The environment in which they are working and playing needs to meet their needs and give plenty of opportunity to read books of their choosing, write or mark make the way they want to and be proud of their ability. When playing with their friends they need lots of opportunity to speak and listen although some they just playing alongside each other without communication. When the boys in my focus group were observed in the role play area I did encourage them to talk with each other to tell me what they were doing. If my setting really wanted to carry out this research again I would suggest that it was conducted over a longer time scale and that each person took a different area to cover such as literacy, numeracy and topic activities. Covering all these activities would give a clearer picture of where the boys were making an improvement and highlight what areas they were failing in. Areas we would then need to concentrate on these throughout their school life to help them achieve their targets and potential.

I would like to have given more time to researching this area within my school setting by involving other year groups or a larger focus group within the study. Working with older children in this short time scale may have highlighted more achievement as they would be able to articulate more about their ambitions and expectations.

I would like to have been a bit more involved with the parents and had them in as separate focus group to discuss the study I wished to carry out. However the time

scale meant this was not feasible as the parents involved often had work and other family commitments. Where I was able to observe a greater parental involvement, through interview, I could see an influence on ability, in particular in reading. More understanding of all of the child's background and their behaviour at home would have been beneficial to see.

This has been a challenging research topic to carry out and, personally, I would like to carry on monitoring these children to see if, by the end of year one, they have reached the projected targets for their age group. Professionally I have learned more about monitoring/observing children in relation to their learning environments and the areas and methods, we as a school cover when it comes to assessing children.

In carrying out this research it has opened up many areas that are involved in helping boys achievements not just within an education environment but helping them emotionally, increase their confidence in their ability and boost their self-esteem so that they realise they can do the task they are given.

One of the children in my focus group said that he "likes coming to school to learn". I hope that by the time he has reached year six (SATS year) we can still encourage him to learn for himself and only himself. (5,674 words)

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