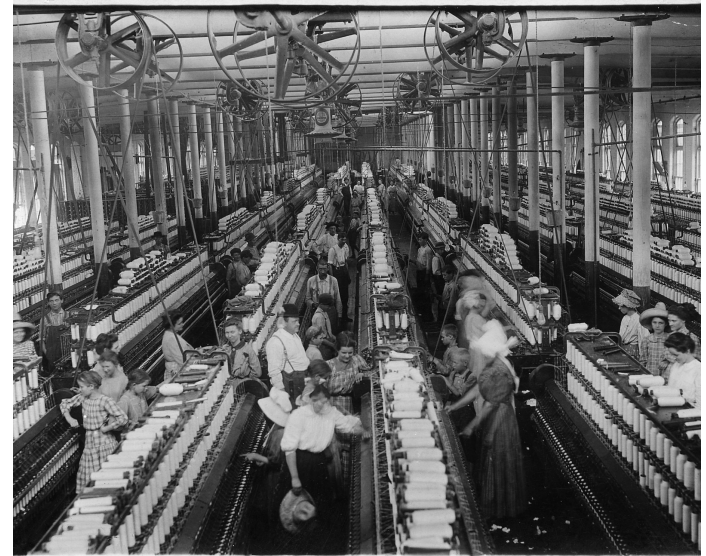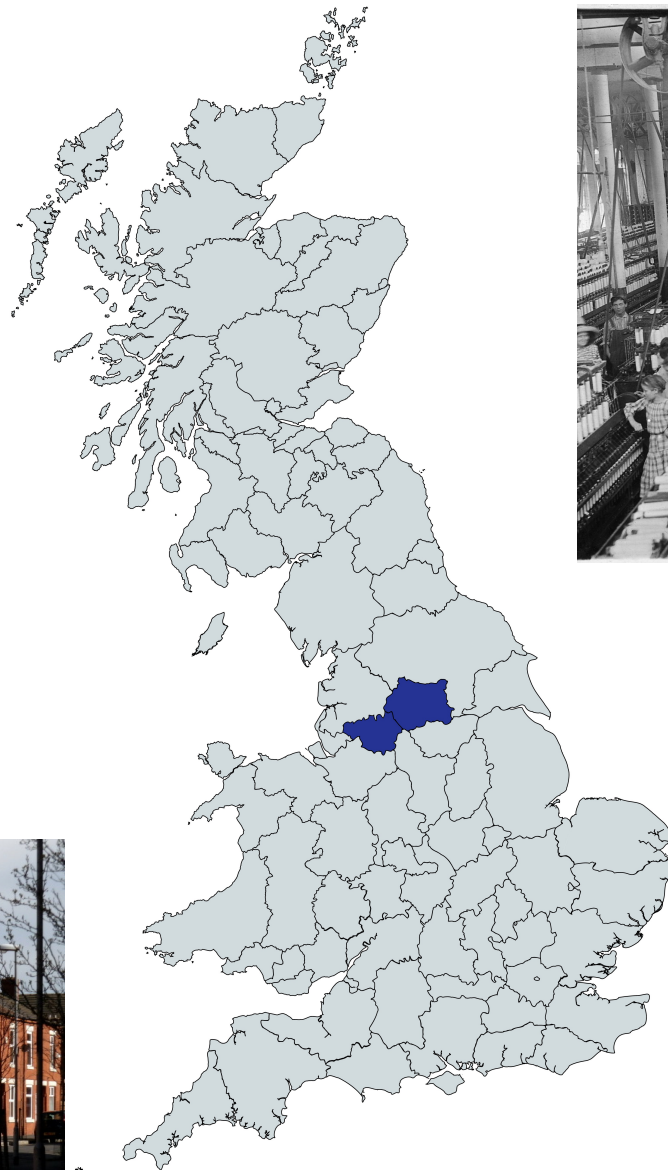# Changing literacy practice in English primary schools; a case study

Dr Jo Pearson

Context; school and me

- We are a multi Academy Trust (MAT). 5 primary schools in the north of England

- My inward facing role is in the central School Improvement team

- My outward facing role is leading our Research School and SCITT

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District	Mean % of pupils' school life for which they are disadvantaged	% persistent disadvantage	Gap
Calderdale	15.8%	8.4%	17.2
Kirklees	18.7%	13.8%	20.1
Leeds	18.3%	10.9%	20.1
Oldham	22.6%	13.6%	19.4
Tameside	19.3%	10.9%	19.2

Statutory Framework

- National Curriculum across England
- National testing in phonics in year 1
- National tests in reading and maths in years 2 and 6
- National teacher assessment of writing in years 2 and 6
- No mandated textbooks or texts

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Putting Evidence to Work: A School's Guide to Implementation – Recommendations Summary

FOUNDATIONS FOR GOOD IMPLEMENTATION

1 Treat implementation as a process, not an event; plan and execute it in stages.

- Allow enough time for effective implementation, particularly in the preparation stage; prioritise appropriately.

2 Create a leadership environment and school climate that is conducive to good implementation.

- Set the stage for implementation through school policies, routines, and practices.
- Identify and cultivate leaders of implementation throughout the school.
- Build leadership capacity through implementation teams.

EXPLORE

3 Define the problem you want to solve and identify appropriate programmes or practices to implement.

- Specify a tight area of focus for improvement that is amenable to change.
- Determine a programme of activity based on existing evidence of what has – and hasn't – worked before.
- Examine the fit and feasibility of possible interventions to the school context.
- Make an adoption decision.

PREPARE

4 Create a clear implementation plan, judge the readiness of the school to deliver that plan, then prepare staff and resources.

- Develop a clear, logical, and well-specified implementation plan:
  a   Specify the active ingredients of the intervention clearly: know where to be 'tight' and where to be 'loose'.
  b   Develop a targeted, yet multi-stranded, package of implementation strategies.
  c   Define clear implementation outcomes and monitor them using robust and pragmatic measures.
- Thoroughly assess the degree to which the school is ready to implement the innovation.
- Once ready to implement an intervention, practically prepare for its use:
  a   Create a shared understanding of the implementation process and provide appropriate support and incentives.
  b   Introduce new skills, knowledge, and strategies with explicit up-front training.
  c   Prepare the implementation infrastructure.

DELIVER

5 Support staff, monitor progress, solve problems, and adapt strategies as the approach is used for the first time.

- Adopt a flexible and motivating leadership approach during the initial attempts at implementation.
- Reinforce initial training with follow-on coaching within the school.
- Use highly skilled coaches.
- Complement expert coaching and mentoring with structured peer-to-peer collaboration.
- Use implementation data to actively tailor and improve the approach.
- Make thoughtful adaptations only when the active ingredients are securely understood and implemented.

SUSTAIN

6 Plan for sustaining and scaling an intervention from the outset and continuously acknowledge and nurture its use.

- Plan for sustaining and scaling an innovation from the outset.
- Treat scale-up as a new implementation process.
- Ensure the implementation data remains fit for purpose.
- Continuously acknowledge, support, and reward good implementation practices.
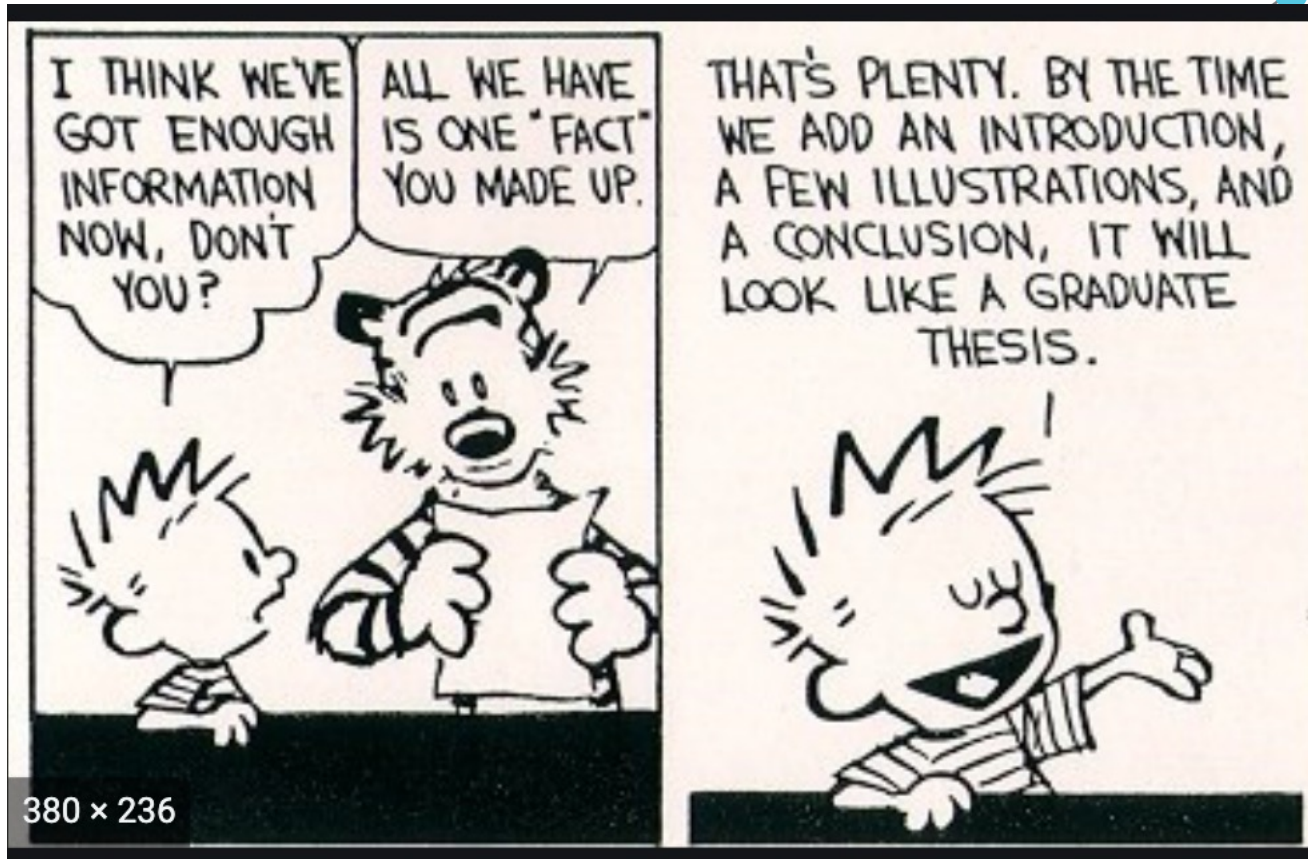
EXPLORE

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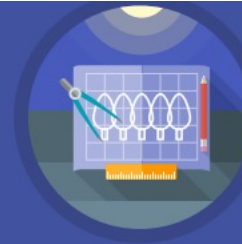
- Identify a tight area for improvement using a robust diagnostic process.

- Make evidence-informed decisions on what to implement.

- Examine the fit and feasibility of possible interventions to the school context.

- Make an adoption decision.

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The big issues:

- Teachers: not all staff had the subject knowledge of the processes that underpin reading; practice was inconsistent in teaching both decoding and comprehension; were unclear about why children were struggling and what to do about it

- Pupils: lacked expressive and receptive vocabulary; don't read for pleasure

- Curriculum: reading approaches in English not mirrored in history, geography, science etc; texts not well integrated or planned for

Does this sound familiar?
What are the issues in your setting?

Lessons learned

- We started too often with what the pupils didn't know/could do without thinking about what the teachers didn't know/could do

- We started too often with the symptom not the cause…eg our pupils score poorly on reading comprehension tests

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PREPARE

Create a clear implementation plan, judge the readiness of the school to deliver that plan, then prepare staff and resources

a. Create a clear, logical, and well-specified plan. Describe:

- the issue you want to address;
- the approach you want to implement – **active ingredients of the intervention**;
- the changes you hope to see – **implementation outcomes** (e.g. fidelity, reach)
- who will be affected by these changes and how;
- the **implementation activities** planned to contribute toward this change
- the resources required; and
- any external factors that could influence results.

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Active Ingredients

'ACTIVE INGREDIENTS' – the essential principles and practices within a programme that relate to the underlying mechanism of change. i.e. What behaviours did we want to see?

As leaders we had to be able to be specific and if we cant articulate this bit nothing else works...

THE GREAT BRITISH BAKING SHOW

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Our ingredients

1. Vocabulary teaching (5 words per week)

2. Reading aloud everyday using a range of texts

3. Inclusion and modelling of 6 comprehension strategies from early years to end of year 6

4. Phonics teaching using Letters and Sounds only

5. Wellcom screening tool and NELI for Early years and Year 1 intervention

Is it specific enough? Have I given scaffolds or straightjackets? Can you articulate what it will look like at 11am on Wednesday am in class 4?

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Lessons learned

- This was hard to do but it mattered more than any other stage we went through

- Knowing where to be tight and where to be loose was key….how many words, when should they model, what should they read…

- Getting the balance has been iterative

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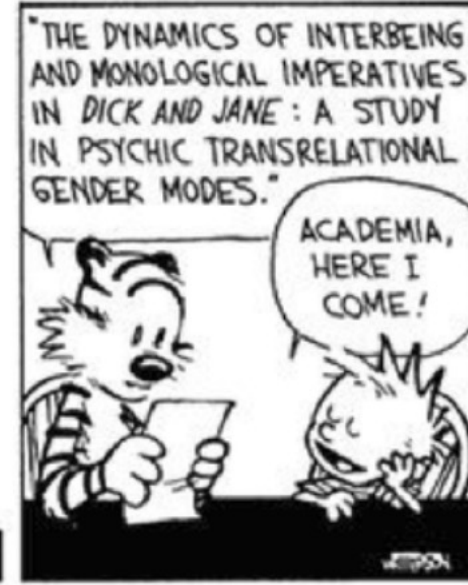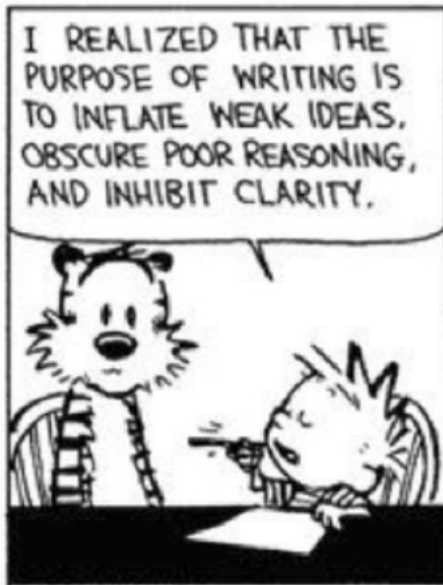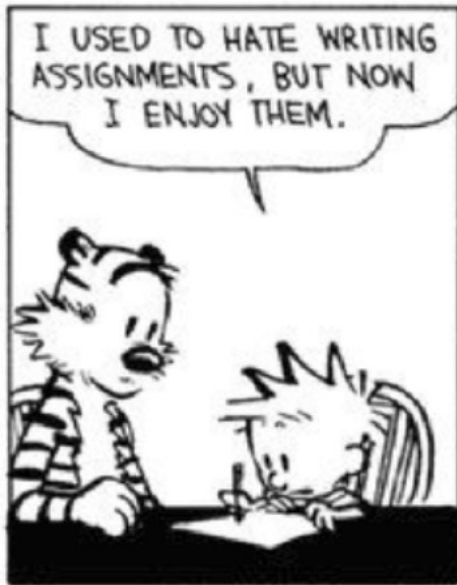
5 DELIVER

Support staff, monitor progress, solve problems, and adapt strategies as the approach is used for the first time

- About continuous improvement: *'Anything worth doing well is worth doing poorly!'*

- Support staff and solve problems using a flexible leadership approach

    Expect push-back - manage expectations and encourage 'buy-in'

- Reinforce initial training with follow-on support within the school

    Coaches/mentors - observation, feedback, modelling, encouragement

    Conceptual understanding   classroom practice

- Use implementation data to drive faithful adoption and intelligent adaption

    People like the latter more than the former!

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From compliance to engagement

What infrastructure did we need?

A team; too much for one person. Owned by a deputy, literacy lead plus phase leads

Training for the staff; upfront and ongoing

Resources; new books and throw out any old phonics resources

Monitoring and quality assurance; are they doing it, are they doing it well, how do they feel about doing it?

Examples

- Whole staff training on Scarborough reading rope and cognitive load

- Whole school use of simple view of reading as a planning tool

- Targeted training in Wellcom and NELI for some staff

- Agenda item on phase meetings; what's going well, bring some examples

- Videoing of modelling

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Do we always build the structure that supports adults to learn in the same detail as we do the children?
How would you rate your adult learning structures and processes?

Lessons learned

- Getting them to do something was the important first step; the right team matters

- Helping them do it better needed to there across the whole year

- Knowing that this was a year long process with room to grow helped with staff buy in

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SUSTAIN

Plan for sustaining and scaling an intervention from the outset and continuously acknowledge and nurture its use
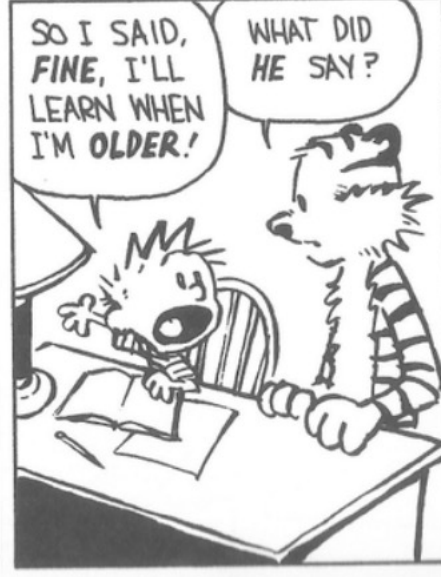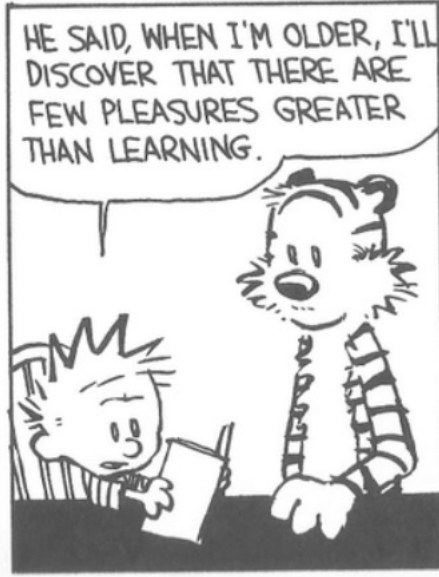
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Delayed gratification….

Evaluation

- This has been impacted by the pandemic both positively and negatively

- Positive: staff can see the needs in the pupils even more than before. Their motivation to meet their needs has increased

- Negative: evaluation has been much patchier; no externally validated data to show impact at child level

- We have used the same process to think about writing

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Were we too ambitious?
Should this always have been a three year staged plan? ?
Do we imagine success happens more quickly than it actually does?

Lessons learned

- Less most definitely is more

- Doing less can feel dangerous for some schools when they are in 'trouble' so they need to know other issues will improve if this one thing is the right one. Reading is a big thing, it will bring other things with it

- Our plan was as much about changing culture as changing reading. Even without a global pandemic we would have needed to keep working on it because culture is huge.

Acceptance…

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Keep in touch! Come and visit

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