



action for inclusion



FEATURES

Getting away from the age-old debate

Let our babies play

The rainbow group

School meals and consulting with young people



Signing, literacy and behaviour

Trudy Fletcher's Year One research project at Turves Green Primary School found that signing brought unexpected benefits

Introduction

Birmingham LA commissioned Turves Green Primary School to trial a programme called Signs for Success, developed by Kathy Robinson. This programme uses sign language to raise levels of 'hearing' children's reading skills and to improve behaviour.

I was approached by the Head Teacher and SENCo to carry out the research despite being new to signing myself. I was provided with the Signs for Success programme training pack including DVDs, books, signing puppet, posters, magic signing gloves and website.

I agreed to complete a research report based on children's progress in their spelling, with some observation of behaviour in the classroom environment.

Background

Turves Green Primary School is in the South of Birmingham and has an intake of 400 pupils approximately. There is a wide mix in terms of social and academic skills and the school has an excellent reputation for inclusion with both academic and physical needs.



Aim

The study, using the Signs for Success programme, aimed to evaluate the impact of signing on children's spelling skills. It also considered if there was an impact on classroom behaviour.

Method

The study involved testing all fifty Year One children for their spelling age at the beginning of the evaluation and then again at the end of six weeks. The spelling test used was the Daniels and Diack Test 2. This graded spelling test provided a spelling age in years and tenths of a year for each child.

Once every child was tested, Class 1FL learned sign language using the Signs for Success programme. This involved learning one sign a day for a period of six weeks and the finger-spelling alphabet. Meanwhile, Class 1F learned their spellings supported by the Jolly Phonics programme.

- Class 1FL children (27) were encouraged to fingerspell and sound each letter of a word followed by saying the word and signing it.
- Class 1F children (23) were encouraged to sound each letter of a word followed by saying the word with support coming from the Jolly Phonics programme currently used in school already.

At the end of the six-week period, class 1FL children were no longer taught any new signs or finger-spelled letters. After a further period of six weeks the children in this class were then tested again for their spelling age to assess whether or not they had retained any progress.

Results


The results for both classes are shown below, in separate tables:


Spelling age results for Year One – 1FL: Trudy Fletcher. Signing used to teach spellings.

Name	Chronological age	Test 1	Test 2	Difference Between Test 1 +2	Test 3	Difference between Test 1 +3	Achieved above Chron. age
HA							
1	6.3	7.0	7.0	0	7.6	0.6	-
2	G+T	5.9	9.2	9.5	0.3	9.2	0
3	6.3	7.6	8.3	0.7	9.0	1.4	-
4	6.1	7.7	8.5	0.8	8.3	0.6	-
5	6.1	7.0	8.2	1.2	8.7	1.7	-
6	L	6.3	7.6	8.3	0.7	7.9	0.3
7	5.7	7.3	8.1	0.8	7.6	0.3	-
8	6.4	7.3	7.7	0.4	7.6	0.3	-
9	6.3	6.4	6.8	0.4	6.7	0.3	-
10	6.2	6.7	6.7	0	6.7	0	-
11	6.2	7.0	7.9	0.9	7.3	0.3	-
12	5.9	5.6	6.2	0.6	5.9	0.3	-
13	5.0	6.2	7.1	0.9	7.2	1.0	-
MA							
14	5.6	5.4	5.5	0.1	5.7	0.3	-
15 L	6.4	5.3	5.9	0.6	6.8	1.5	-
16	5.7	6.3	6.6	0.3			
17	5.7	5.9	7.1	1.2	6.1	0.2	-
18	5.6	6.8	6.8	0	7.0	0.2	-
LA							
19 L	5.7	6.3	6.5	0.2	6.6	0.3	-
20 L	5.5	5.2	5.5	0.3	5.2	0	-
21	5.10	5.4	6.3	0.9	6.2	0.8	-
22 L	6.2	5.0	5.0	0	5.2	0.2	-
23	5.10	5.0	5.0	0	5.3	0.3	-
24	6.0	5.0	5.2	0.2	5.3	0.3	-
25	5.7	5.0	5.3	0.3	5.2	0.2	-
26	6.0	5.2	5.3	0.1	5.3	0.1	-
27	5.8	5.0	5.0	0	5.0	0	-

HA = Higher Ability, MA = Middle Ability, LA = Lower Ability, L = Left Handed, G+T = Gifted and Talent Register

- Chronological age is shown in years and months.
- Spelling age shown in years and tenths of a year. For example 5.3 indicates a spelling age of 5 years and 3 tenths of a year.
- 27% of class are on the special needs register for lower ability.
- 4 % of children are on the Gifted and Talented register.

 indicates 6 months' or more progress in spelling age.

 indicates the same spelling age or a decline between tests.

General comments

Children who wrote with their left hand began to record letters and numbers the correct way round during the programme. Once the programme of signing had finished they began reversing their letters.

19% of children were left-handed.

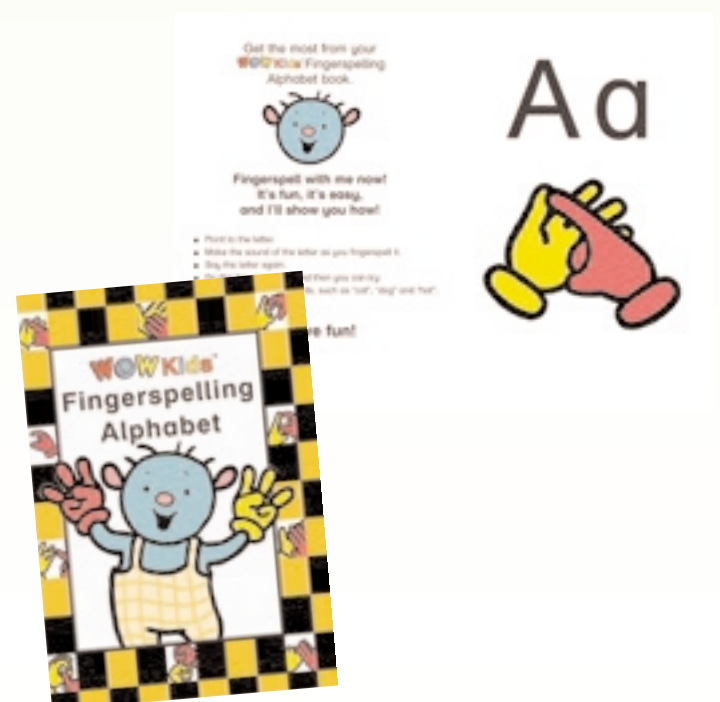
69% of children were achieving above their chronological age.

Summary of the results for class 1FL, using signing

With 27 children in the class, the results showed that for the first 6 weeks of the trial:

- 8 children made up to 6 weeks' progress in their spelling age (the expected progress from pupil tracking and assessment).
- 8 children made between 7 weeks' and 6 months' progress.
- 9 children made between 6 and 12 months' progress.
- 2 children made more than 1 year's progress in their spelling age.

The results also show that on the third test, 6 weeks after the end of the intervention, the children had maintained the progress that they had made during the period in which they had learned signing. All the pupils achieved either the same spelling age as on Test 2, or they had continued to make progress.





Spelling age results for Year One – 1F: De Franklin.
Jolly Phonics used to teach spellings.

Name	Chronological age	Test 1	Test 2	Difference Between Test 1 +2	Achieved above Chron. age
HA					
1 G+T	6.4	7.9	8.1	0.2	—
2	6.4	6.5	6.3	-0.2	—
3	6.2	6.7	6.8	0.1	—
4 G+T	6.2	7.8	8.2	0.4	—
5	5.7	6.5	6.6	0.1	—
6 G+T	6.0	8.1	7.7	-0.4	—
7 L	6.1	6.3	6.3	0	—
8	5.7	5.5	6.0	0.5	—
9	5.7	6.1	6.3	0.2	—
10	5.6	6.3	6.2	-0.1	—
11	6.1	6.5	6.2	-0.3	—
12	5.10	6.0	6.2	0.2	—
13	5.10	6.3	6.2	-0.1	—
14	5.7	6.1	6.4	0.3	—
MA					
15	6.2	5.8	6.1	0.3	—
16 L	6.4	5.2	5.7	0.5	—
17	6.4	6.2	6.4	0.2	—
18 L	6.2	6.4	6.0	-0.4	—
LA					
19 L	5.9	6.2	6.3	0.1	—
20	5.7	6.3	6.2	-0.1	—
21	5.6	5.7	5.9	0.2	—
22	5.5	5.0	5.2	0.2	—
23	6.0	5.6	5.8	0.2	—

HA = Higher Ability, MA = Middle Ability, LA = Lower Ability, L = Left Handed, G+T = Gifted and Talent Register

- Chronological age is shown in years and months.
- Spelling age is shown in years and tenths of a year.
- 13% of class are on the special needs register for lower ability.
- 13% of children are on the register for Gifted and Talented.

 indicates 6 months or more progress in spelling age.

 indicates no progress in spelling age or a decline between tests.

17% of children were left-handed.

87% of children were achieving above their chronological age.

Summary of the results for class 1F, using Jolly Phonics.

With 23 children in the class, the results showed that during the 6-week trial:

- 7 children made no progress at all.
- 4 children made up to 6 weeks' progress in their spelling age (expected progress from pupil tracking and assessment).
- 12 children made between 7 weeks' and 6 months' progress.
- No children made between 6 and 12 months' progress.
- No children made more than 1 year's progress in their spelling age.

Summary of findings for both classes, when comparing spelling age results between Tests 1 and 2.

1FL TRUDY FLETCHER	1F DE FRANKLIN
41 % of children made 6 months' plus progress in their spelling age.	9% of children made 6 months' plus progress in their spelling age.
22% of children made no progress.	35% of children made no progress .
37% of children made between one tenth to 4 tenths of a year's progress.	57% of children made between one tenth to 4 tenths of a year's progress.

Classroom observations regarding behaviour.

General observations and comments were noted during the periods when the children were signing. Some comments below are about links with the school and home as these were extremely valuable also.

"Whilst the teacher is talking, children sign to ask to go to the toilet and this avoids any interruption to the group as the teacher is able to continue talking to rest of the class."

"Children talking in line stop talking quickly because other children copy the class teacher and make the sign for 'quiet'."

"During assembly children who talk are soon aware that they have been spotted talking and the sign for 'quiet' is used, thus avoiding interruption."

"During song practice children sign words they know and, due to freedom of movement, less counts of disruption are noticed."

"During lesson time children are beginning to sign to each other as opposed to using voices, making it a quieter working atmosphere. This particularly helped a child with a tendency to call out."

“During guided reading sessions children began finger-spelling unfamiliar words as well as sounding them out to help them remember new words.”

“During registration children began signing; this made registration a calm and quiet start to the day which then fed into the first lesson.”

“Children began signing with other members of the school and were excited to share their new-found knowledge.”

“Children began talking about teaching their families signing and said that they had begun doing signing when they read at home.”

Parents' comments at the start of the project

We interviewed two parents prior to teaching any signing to the children:

Comment 1

“I am happy for my child to learn signing as it is another skill I suppose but I am unsure as to how it will benefit my child academically.”

Comment 2

“Why are the children learning signing? What benefits do you feel it will have on my child?” (Info from the Signs for Success DVD was shared.) “I trust that you know how this will benefit my child and I would be happy for my child to learn signing and be very interested in the results of the spelling age tests.”

Both parents were assured that the progress would be shared with them once results were collected.

Parent comments' at the end of the project

During parents' evenings the results of the programme were shared with parents; many were surprised and extremely pleased. The parents also indicated that during the project their child had been coming home and teaching them the newest sign for that day!

Comments made included:

“I am so pleased with the progress my child has made. I couldn't believe the impact that it would have.”

“I feel my child struggles in school a bit and I feel this has helped with his concentration and his ability to remember things especially spellings. I will definitely do this at home with him more.”

“It's amazing, we are actually sitting down as a family learning this new skill together and we are all enjoying it.”

“I signed from my kitchen window into the garden that tea was ready and my son told me off because I had not done it correctly.”

“I think it is a super skill to have as not only can they communicate with people with speech or hearing difficulties, they have learnt something new that they can take anywhere in life with them.”

“I have enjoyed learning this skill from my child.”

“I have been so thrilled with all that my child has achieved and this is something we do together at home. My son constantly asks us for words he can sign to us....and even I can see that this is improving his spelling and concentration at home....his confidence has grown tremendously.”

“We hope that our daughter will have the opportunity to continue this.” (Resources have been bought for Key Stage One and we will all be teaching the children signing and using it as part of our everyday routine).

All the parents interviewed were pleased to know that it would be implemented throughout school so that their children would continue learning this new skill.

Recommendations for future action

- Teachers in Foundation and Key Stage One to adopt a 'Sign a Day' approach with classes from September 2006.
- Teacher workshops for learning signing and support to be given. Five minutes at each Monday staff meeting could be set aside for learning the five new signs for the following week.
- Parents to be informed about the Signs for Success programme and what it involves so that they can support their children in the home environment. Parent workshops to be offered.
- Liaising with other schools to give and receive support, including our partnership school in the 'Leading for Inclusion Project' i.e. 'Merrishaw Community Nursery'.
- Completing a parent questionnaire about attitudes and beliefs regarding hearing children signing.
- Completing a teacher questionnaire about attitudes and beliefs regarding the teaching of signing and the pros and cons related to it.
- Evaluating, after one year, how the signing has benefited the children or any difficulties faced and experienced from a parent and teacher perspective.
- Keeping up to date with research and progress regarding signing in schools with hearing children.
- Funding to employ a part-time deaf tutor to work with both staff and children.

Research project Turves Green Primary School 2006 Completed by Trudy Fletcher, Class Teacher, Year one.

Turves Green Primary School has produced a DVD about this project. If you would like to receive a free copy please contact Marion Halfpenny on 0121 464 3686 or email: enquiry@turvesgreen-pri.sch.uk. (Limited number of copies available)

To learn more about the Signs for Success programme visit www.signsforsuccess.co.uk.