

## “Active Banking” – accelerated vocabulary enhancement

**Bishop Challoner Catholic College**

### **Problem: What challenges do your school(s) have that need to be addressed?**

Pupil independent reading habits are declining just as changes to GCSE assessment have restored literacy rigour to English and humanities subjects with a premium on extended writing and inferential reading. Although some of the required literacy skills can be effectively taught, vocabulary acquisition – the key component of exam literacy – tends not to be taught systematically and is regarded as an “organic”, incidental side effect of reading. The new examination system is likely to expose this and the negative impact on progress will be disproportionately apparent in less able and disadvantaged socio-economic groups. Secondary schools need to teach pupils active reading strategies that enable them to derive the largest vocabulary gains possible from the kind of non-fiction reading they are actually doing in school and ever more frequently, online in their own time.

### **Innovation: How will the innovation help improve the problem you have identified and benefit teachers and learners?**

The project is based on the premise that pupils – and boys in particular – have a better vocabulary than they realise but concerns over spelling errors inhibit more appropriate challenging vocabulary choices. Unwritten codes of male adolescent behaviour also mean that using advanced vocabulary in everyday conversation is not always culturally acceptable. Equipping pupils with the skill to interrogate the sort of non-fiction texts they experience in school and use it to explicitly grow a bank of high value, context transferable words will significantly enhance reading comprehension and QWC – the quality of written communication which is assessed in new GCSE humanities exams. The project will model the way in which enhancement of vocabulary can be evidenced and given high cultural status within schools.

Pupils will be trained in an active reading strategy called “Active Banking”. In any given text across the curriculum they actively identify adjectives (and verbs). They reflect on and classify the adjectives using a “Goldilocks” formula.

1 – Too easy (known it since primary school)

3 – Too difficult (I couldn't transfer that word for use in another context)

2 – Just right (I could confidently use it in another context)

Pupils will be trained to hone in and store two adjectives in their word banks. They are challenged to use them in randomly generated spoken and written contexts with the maxim: “If you don't use it, you lose it”. Pupils gain recognition and rewards by placing an \* next to “university” words (those classified as “just right”) in written work in English, humanities and literacy based subjects (history, geography, religious studies and citizenship) which represent 45% of curriculum time.

### **Existing evidence: What evidence is there that this innovation will improve outcomes?**

#### Literature review

Key educational research in this niche area has influenced our project to date: “Vocabulary words should be those that the learner will find useful in many contexts” (Beck, McKeown & Kucan, 2002). Vocabulary learning is effective when it entails active engagement that goes beyond definitional knowledge. Stahl and Kapinus (2001) stated “When children know a word they not know a word's definition and its logical relationship with other words, they also know how the word functions in different contexts”. Structured active reading strategies have been shown to be very effective: “Once students know what is expected of them ... they learn very rapidly” (Kamil, 2004). Active Banking is an offshoot of a literacy/humanities research project called Devil's Advocate which we devised and led as a teaching school in 2012–2014. It was published by the National College for Teaching and Leadership as an exemplar case study.

#### Current use of Active Banking

An active banking approach has been used in English lessons at the lead school. Internal school tracking data indicates that as pupils' word banks develop gains are seen in the following areas: improvements in reading age; improvements in written outcomes in English and humanities; improved levels of engagement in reading for boys in particular; improvements in self-esteem;

improvements in ways in which pupils navigate more challenging texts.

Boys involved in the project see reading as a more purposeful activity and the words banked are a tangible return for their efforts. Internal tracking of our in-house projects suggest the strategy pre-empts and prevents relative male underachievement. Of particular interest is our internal tracking data which suggests the strategy is effective in helping able disadvantaged pupils keep pace with able peers.

**Research question or hypothesis: What effect will the intervention, implemented for how long, with which pupils, have on what outcomes?**

What effect will the use of an Active Banking approach in all English and humanities lessons for eight months have on the reading age and vocabulary of Year 7 and 8 pupils?

**Method: Include sample, design, measures, intervention, process evaluation, and analysis**

### **Sample**

360 Year 7 and 8 pupils across two secondary schools will participate. Both Bishop Challoner Catholic College and John Henry Newman Catholic College are large, mixed comprehensives in Birmingham. In Bishop Challoner Catholic College the proportion of pupils supported by pupil premium is broadly in line with the national average, whereas in John Henry Newman Catholic College the proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium is much higher than average (52%). On entry general KS2 attainment is above the national average in Bishop Challoner Catholic College and below the national average in John Henry Newman Catholic College.

In Bishop Challoner Catholic College, Year 7 and 8 pupils are taught in ability streamed sets. These sets are based on the score on the standardised reading test pupils take at the end of Key Stage 2, and pupils are in the same sets for English, history, geography, religious studies and citizenship lessons, which form approximately 45% of the Year 7 and 8 timetables. As set 7 is a nurture group only pupils in sets 1–6 will participate in the evaluation. Some pupils change sets in the middle of Year 8 following the key assessment point, but this will not happen during the course of the evaluation. Pupils occasionally move between sets at other points in time (eg. due to social issues), and if a pupil moved from between conditions their data would be removed from the evaluation.

In John Henry Newman Catholic College, Year 7 and 8 pupils are taught in mixed ability classes.

They are taught in the same classes for English, history, geography, religious studies and citizenship lessons, which form approximately 45% of the Year 7 and 8 timetables. Pupils occasionally move between sets at other points in time (eg. due to social issues), and if a pupil moved from between conditions their data would be removed from the evaluation.

### Consent

Parents of participating students will be made aware of the strategy and asked to take an interest in the vocabulary banks as they grow. Parents will be asked to sign an authorisation slip to consent to their child's involvement in the evaluation.

### **Allocation to groups**

In Bishop Challoner Catholic College, pupils in sets 1, 4 and 5 will form the control group and pupils in sets 2, 3 and 6 will form the intervention group. These groupings were chosen to try to ensure the average abilities of participants in the conditions as equivalent as possible, although pre-test data will be used to consider the equivalence of these groups before the intervention starts. At Bishop Challoner Catholic College, English teachers generally teach only one set per year.

In John Henry Newman Catholic College, mixed ability classes will be allocated randomly to the intervention or control conditions.

### **Measures**

The same measures will be administered at pre- and post-testing with control and intervention group pupils. Post-test will be carried out when the intervention has been running for eight months:

#### Hodder Group Reading Test

The Hodder Group Reading Test is a measure of reading comprehension at word, sentence and text levels. Items assess pupil's understanding of word meanings, culturally neutral sentence-completion questions and higher-level tasks that require pupils to both comprehend and reflect upon the content and the context of continuous text. The test provides reading ages and standardised scores derived from word recognition.

The person marking the test will be unaware of the identity of the pupil and whether they are in the experimental or control group. If teachers mark the tests, papers will be swapped between the schools (so markers cannot guess the identity of the pupil based on handwriting or

expression) and teachers will mark papers of pupils across a range of classes (so there is no indication of which set pupils attending Bishop Challoner Catholic College are in). Alternatively, somebody external to both schools may be asked to mark the tests.

### Attitudinal Surveys

Pupils will complete Likert scale attitudinal surveys to track attitudes towards reading.

### **Delivery of Intervention**

#### Training and materials

English teachers of intervention groups will be given training in using the Active Banking approach from the research lead (who is deputy head and an English teacher at Bishop Challoner Catholic College).

History, geography, religious studies and citizenship teachers working with intervention group classes would be given separate, less detailed training about how to support and encourage pupils to use their word banks in literacy-based lessons. This could focus on supporting pupils to use words from their word banks in written work, and recognising and praising pupils when they do this.

All intervention group pupils will be given a Word Bank in which to write words they wish to use in future work. Teaching assistants working with innovation group classes will be given a written summary of Active Banking and encouraged to support and praise pupils in using the approach.

A launch event will be used to introduce the Active Banking approach to intervention group pupils. Pupils will be taken off timetable. They will be given their Word Bank and taught how to use it. This will be used as an opportunity to emphasise the importance the school are placing on this intervention and to raise the status of Active Banking.

#### Innovation

Intervention group pupils will be expected to have their Word Bank on their desk in all English, history, geography, religious studies and citizenship lessons. English teachers will reinforce the use of word banks and will make time in lessons for pupils to add university words (those which pupils feel they could apply to a different context) that they have come across in the lesson into their word banks. Particular emphasis will be placed on adjectives and verbs. In the long term it is hoped that pupils will learn to identify university words and write them in their Word Bank independently, although it is likely that English teachers may need to support them initially.

Humanities teachers will also encourage pupils to add words to their Word Bank as appropriate.

Before all written work in English and humanities lessons, teachers will encourage pupils to think about which words in their Word Bank they could use in their writing. Pupils will place an \* next to any university words they have used in written work.

Humanities and English teachers recognise and reward use of this vocabulary over time. Good use of new vocabulary will be celebrated by teachers in lessons, and by senior teachers who visit intervention classrooms. Pupils will also have the opportunity to earn additional merit points within the whole school system for using new vocabulary in their writing. Text messages will be sent to pupils' parents to inform them if their child is using new vocabulary well in their writing. "Fun" spelling bee style vocabulary contests will take place in which pupils are asked to use a given word correctly in a sentence. The senior teachers leading this project at Bishop Challoner Catholic College and John Henry Newman Catholic College will be in regular contact to ensure that the innovation, including rewards incentives, are applied equally across the two schools.

#### Follow-up support and treatment integrity

A simple proforma designed for use in both schools will provide tick box feedback on how effectively staff are reinforcing the initiative. This proforma will be used in learning walks to ensure Active Banking is being appropriately reinforced across the curriculum. These learning walks will also be used as an opportunity to give verbal encouragement to pupils who are using new vocabulary in their written work.

The research lead will undertake learning walks at Bishop Challoner Catholic College. The research lead will join a senior teacher in carrying out the first learning walk at John Henry Newman Catholic College in order to demonstrate the use of the proforma. This senior teacher will carry out subsequent learning walks at John Henry Newman Catholic College.

#### **Process evaluation**

Interviews with teachers and pupils from the intervention groups will be carried out after the intervention has been running for 8 months. These will focus on teacher and pupil perceptions of the intervention. It will use interviews and surveys to sample views of a range of pupils across the ability and effect size range.

#### **Data analysis**

Excel will be used to calculate effect sizes for reading and vocabulary. Excel will also be used to calculate the impact of Active Banking on pupil attitudes to reading, including tests of the

statistical significance of any effects.

### Confidentiality

All pupil data and case studies will be anonymised and relative performance of key subgroups of pupils eg. less able/disadvantaged will be presented in a way that ensures anonymity. The vocabulary tests and Likert scales will be identified by randomly generated pupil numbers rather than names so that pupils cannot be identified by those marking tests and analysing data.

**Conclusion: What will happen if your innovation improves outcomes, or not?  
What are the limitations of your evaluation?**

### **Implications**

The project will be upscaled if it is found to be effective.

### **Possible limitations and attempts to reduce the impact of these**

It is possible that the control group may learn about perceived benefits of the intervention (including vocabulary development, additional merits and texts to parents) and may feel demoralised that they are not receiving these. To try to reduce this threat, celebrations, the giving of rewards and vocabulary bees will take place in lesson time to reduce the profile of Active Banking to control participants.

It is possible that members of staff will give preferential treatment to control group pupils to make up for not receiving the perceived benefits from the intervention. This limitation will be reduced by ensuring all members of staff understand the importance of carrying out fair tests in order to establish which methods of teaching are most effective.

It is possible that some teachers may teach both the control and intervention groups, and may use elements of Active Banking with control group pupils. In order to address this limitation:

- Only intervention group pupils will be given word banks, and it is hoped that this will remind teachers when to use Active Banking strategies.
- Observations of control group lessons will be used to identify whether any elements of Active Banking are being used. This will include observations of humanities teachers and teaching assistants who are teaching pupils in both conditions.
- During Active Banking training, it will be reinforced to staff that it is important for the fair running of the trial that control pupils do not receive elements of the intervention.

While some pupils in the control group of the lead school will have experienced an Active Banking approach in the past, it is felt that they are unlikely to independently use this strategy

without access to word banks or support and encouragement from school staff.

This evaluation is taking place in two secondary schools in the West Midlands. Care should be taken not to over-generalise any results to other settings or contexts without further evaluation.

As the evaluation is being carried out at two schools, it is possible that it will be implemented differently in the two settings. Comprehensive training, provision of materials, observations and follow-up support will reduce this threat.

### **Communication**

Findings will be disseminated through the Research Schools Network and the local Teaching School Alliance.

## References

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