

Dyslexia Action Literacy Models – Embedding Good Practice

Margaret Rooms

Dyslexia Action has been working in primary schools using our own literacy materials and has recently embarked on complementary projects in secondary schools. This article is based on a document produced for the P4L schools to help them to organise this provision once the project has finished. We hope that it will also be informative for other schools and staff who wish to organise intervention using these materials.

Introduction

Partner schools in Dyslexia Action's Partnership for Literacy project (Piggott J 2009) have had experience of using our literacy development materials first-hand. Many staff in these schools are feeling confident in using the materials and will have seen the progress children can make and the difference in their work and confidence. From talking to teachers and pupils in the various P4L partner schools around the country, I thought it might be useful to document different models for using the literacy materials and to answer some of your questions, so that you can see that they do not have to be expensive in terms of staff to implement, and might even free up some staff time!

The Current Model

The model used in P4L was dictated by three main factors:

1. The Dyslexia Action teacher would only be in the partner school one day a week
2. Training for the teachers and TAs was paramount
3. The project was being evaluated by the University of Durham.

This meant that the teaching model looked 'concentrated' and heavily staffed with significant disruption to the timetable. The good news however is that once you take these three factors out of the equation you are left with a great deal of flexibility in how you utilize the skills and materials provided through P4L.

The Literacy Materials

The two literacy programmes are The Active Literacy Kit (ALK) and Units of Sound (UofS).

The ALK is very hands-on kinaesthetic material consisting of 30 short exercises which are repeated until accuracy and a target time are met. Although this comes

in a large box and looks like a lot when it is spread out, it is important to remember that it only covers the skills from no letter-sound correspondence through to reading and spelling cvc words – cat, fat, mat. These are vital skills and we all know of 15 year olds (and even 50 year olds) who have not mastered them. However, children should be working through this **quickly**.

UofS is computer based and as such is ideal to be used in groups and/or independently. Once a child knows how to use the programme it is only necessary for staff to monitor its use and do a weekly 'check-reading' exercise; everything else is independent work.

'Agh but', I hear you say, 'how can we be sure they are doing it properly if we aren't sitting with them one-to-one?'

There are checks and balances built into the programme which enable you to make sure the child is on track with their work and that you are alerted if you need to intervene (Rooms M 2009). Trust the programme and it will do its job and save your staff time. We have also produced some new Good Practice Check-lists, which establish when a child is ready to work independently.

How much time should a child spend on the programmes a week?

It is true that if you only spend 30 minutes a week on a literacy development programme then this equates to roughly 16 hours a year (allowing for beginning and end of term delays). If a child has a 2 or 3 year deficit in literacy you will need more input than this to close that gap quickly. An hour a week is more realistic – even more is better. The recently published report by Sir Jim Rose (Identifying and Teaching Children with Dyslexia and Literacy Difficulties, DCSF 2009, p12, p57, p92) recommends 'little and often' for structured intervention.

How should this time be organised?

The current P4L model is normally one hour once a week with the Dyslexia Action teacher present with a further session of 30 minutes on another day recommended. The advantage of this is that it will be timetabled and so the time should be ring-fenced. If the child is absent on that day or the TA is absent or needed elsewhere then the lesson is cancelled and the input lost. However, for some schools this is a perfectly good model to follow.

The time can also be organised on a 'little and often' basis with sessions lasting just 15-20 minutes several times a week. The advantage here is that if a session is lost, the child doesn't lose the whole week's input. It also means that the child is out of the classroom for shorter periods at a time.

So if you decide on a weekly total amount of time that you want to spend on the programmes, it doesn't really matter how you split up that time.

Does the teaching need to be one-to-one?

No, no, no, no, no. I am repeating myself because saying it once never seems to be enough!

Both of the materials were designed originally to be used in small groups: children 'take turns' in ALK and work independently on PCs with UofS.

I know that there are added benefits (sometimes) of working 1:1 where the child gets a lot of attention. I would say however, that even if a child starts off like this, working independently or in a small group should be the aim as quickly as possible.

The optimum size of a group depends on a number of factors, including:

- Size of the available space
- Individual needs of the children
- Skills of the teacher / TA
- Availability of equipment / computers
- UofS licence held by the school.

Licence

The standard licence issued for UofS to P4L schools is the 6 concurrent user licence. This means that you are limited to groups of 6 pupils using the **program at the same time**. You can of course upgrade this licence should you require wider access in your school.

Possible Models: A

UofS Group of 3 or 4 pupils x 1 hour + 1 teacher or TA

This allows the teacher to spend up to 15 minutes with each pupil: check-reading and looking at scores for Spelling. The UofS Stage 1 Exercises (paper-based) can be used in this lesson as well.

Each pupil should cover: 2 pages for reading; 2 pages for spelling; 1 x UofS Exercises; 1 x check-reading with the teacher; 1 x either Memory or Dictation (providing they have reached this level).

Possible Models: B

ALK & UofS group of 6-8 pupils x 1 hour + 2

TAs/teachers

This is a team teaching situation where the 6 pupils are taught by 2 members of staff. You could organise it by having one teacher working with ALK and the other UofS – as in model A.

Possible Models: C

UofS in the classroom – the integrated model

This model builds on the independent learning aspect of the programme. Each pupil works on 1 page of reading and 1 of spelling a day, 4 times a week independently. On the 5th day the TA in the classrooms conducts the check-reading exercise and has a look at the scores. The time for this independent work is not specifically timetabled and no additional staff time is needed. Once the pupil has been shown how to use the program as checked by the Good Practice Check-lists he/she should no longer need someone micro-managing the work. Because the pupil doesn't leave the classroom this work should become seamless with other activities and can be fitted in at any suitable 15 minutes. This model maximises the 'little and often' concept and reinforces the idea that the TA/teacher 'oversees' the bulk of the work rather than being directly involved in the teaching.

Secondary School considerations

In secondary schools organisation of interventions is a major task and needs to be planned carefully. Because the timetable is based around the curriculum rather than the class, model C above would not be appropriate. Because of the age of the children however the decision to miss a lesson cannot be taken lightly and alternatives need to be considered. As always, there is no 'one size fits all' solution. In our secondary projects we have been trialling using UofS on a USB so that it can be used at home as well thus minimising the amount of time needed out of the classroom. Group lessons of 6 students to 2 TAs were standard.

One secondary school struggled to get UofS established until it acquired a permanent space for teaching. 'Booking' a room for each lesson and then arranging for laptops and carrying books and files created artificial barriers to the teaching. Since having their own room where the computers are fixed in booths they regularly see 100 students a week for their UofS lessons.

Further Developments and Technical Support

A reminder that UofS has its own website www.unitsofsound.net where you can access all the latest information about the program and its sister program Units of Sound: Literacy that fits, which is used in the home. This is also where you can access technical support and minor upgrades. The Good Practice check-sheets are available as a free download.

Please note that the UofS on USB is not yet a commercial product – but if anyone is interested in using it please contact me.

Margaret Rooms

*Margaret Rooms is Head of Educational Development at
Dyslexia Action mrooms@dyslexiaaction.org.uk*

References

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