

# KS2 literacy improvement at Wygate Park Academy

Dr Craig Early has been Head of Wygate Park Academy – a primary academy in Spalding, Lincolnshire – for six years. He first heard about Bedrock Learning through the Academy’s associated Trust, Boston Witham Academies Federation (BAAF).

A mentor, content writer (for BBC Bitesize amongst others) and researcher (published in PSTT, RSC and more), he wanted to see how Bedrock could benefit KS2 learners. The 2015 Science Teacher of the year told us he “does not implement anything unless there is a clear reason and it will have impact.”

We spoke to Craig about the demands of teaching EAL learners vocabulary, embedding the teaching of vocabulary across the school, his implementation strategies and bridging the word gap at transition.

## Why is teaching vocabulary so important to you?

Vocabulary T&L takes on more importance here as over 50% of our learners are EAL. We always say that “reading is a gateway to everything”. Vocabulary and reading go hand in hand – they are the foundation to unlock confidence, oracy and self-esteem. Once you have that foundation, you can develop writing and oracy.

This is very much in line with the findings of the recent Oxford Language Report: Bridging the Word Gap at Transition.

## As a science specialist, how do you think we should be teaching vocabulary in the classroom?

Across the curriculum, especially in Maths and Science, learners have to use technical vocabulary. We teach words so that learners can fully understand them, show that they understand them and use them in a range of contexts. For example, when teaching materials and properties in science, learners need to experience words using all their senses to grasp the concepts behind them. They need to touch an object to know and understand that it is ‘metallic’, for example.

We favour a fully immersive approach to vocabulary teaching in the classroom – learners love nothing more than using new words!

## How have you embedded Bedrock into your T&L across the school?

There can be apathy and a sense of going through the motions, so it is important to have a symbiotic approach to literacy.

To give you a few examples:

I ask learners to stop me in the corridor and tell me a new word they've learnt on Bedrock.

Students highlight Bedrock words in their writing.

Students place a post it note in their reading books if there is a word they haven't come across and look it up. By the end of the book, they may have 50 post-it notes of new words they have learnt!

I was observing a lesson the other day and drew from the Bedrock display (which all KS2 classrooms have). The display shows the Bedrock words students are learning, as well as their meanings (written by students in their own words).

I went around the class: "What does 'shimmer' mean? Can you use it in a sentence?" Every single learner knew what each word meant and could use them confidently!

## Are you happy with the progress learners make on Bedrock?

Yes, Bedrock is a really powerful tool. It gives impetus to our literacy approaches.

Our Trust improvement team brought it to our attention. It's been really successful in raising word-consciousness. Much to teachers' annoyance, I like to pop in and ask learners about their work on Bedrock – they love that recognition.

Our learners were being penalised on the vocabulary questions on their SATs paper. One year they were asked to describe a "recess" – most of our learners didn't know what it meant as they simply hadn't come across it. This links to cultural capital. Some may have said it is an American word for "breaktime", but that was about it. None of them knew that it was a dent on a wall!

We knew we couldn't teach 30 million words and their meanings by ourselves – the systematic way Bedrock exposes learners to Tier 2 words really appealed to us.

I remember Bedrock mentioning the 30-million word gap in our CPD session. It's absolutely right – we see it in the classroom. Learners who have lots of conversations with adults and read at home naturally inquire about new words and their meanings. We have a large percentage of learners where that doesn't happen.

## What appealed to you about Bedrock Learning?

The “quality over quantity” approach – the consistent drip feed, repetition, spaced learning and the power of practice we get with Bedrock is embedded in everything we do.

## How have you implemented Bedrock?

Learners are given three sessions a week to access Bedrock. We do need to invest in devices, as that can affect timetabling.

We will look into the parental engagement features on Bedrock to see if more could be done at home. We wanted it all in school initially for quality control – to make sure learners and staff invested in it.

Over lockdown, Bedrock formed part of our remote learning action plan.

## How has a focus on word gaps helped to ensure smooth transitions between feeder schools in the BWAF Trust?

Across BWAF Boston schools, transitions are managed really well in all subjects. The BWAF transition project was really insightful; secondary school teachers were able to see the terminology we used in primary and vice versa – it didn’t always match up. It’s helped inform a more uniform approach to language (particularly disciplinary literacy).

Exposure to academic vocabulary plays a big part in the BWAF transition package. Over the summer, learners are given knowledge organisers to prepare them for that leap up to secondary school. Just as with the transition from Year 2 to Year 3, it’s all about laying the groundwork.

Going forward, it would be astute for us to ask our linked secondary schools whether they use Bedrock. This could create a sense of continuity and much-needed familiarity for learners.

## What else is in the pipeline to drive literacy improvement?

We are currently in the process of revamping all the classroom libraries to include the top 50 reads for each respective year group.

We also plan to open a “reading cafe” where learners can share books and relax during their breaks. As I said, reading is the gateway to everything!