

**Sport Wales
PESS and PLPS Case Study**

Reading Buddies:

***Raising reading standards
through sport-themed
mentoring***

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Reading Buddies

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Key Points

- *Reading Buddies highlights the important role of young sport leaders in developing the reading competencies of younger boys.*
- *Peer mentors used sport-themed literature to improve the reading levels and self-confidence of their buddies.*
- *This case study highlights how schools can use sport and PE as a vehicle to address the priorities of the National Literacy Framework.*

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Context

Physical literacy is a holistic concept which can be described as the 'motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge and understanding to value and take responsibility for engagement in physical activities for life.' (Whitehead, 2014). A growing body of evidence strongly suggests that physical literacy not only allows children and young people to fulfil their physical potential, but also improves attention, concentration, engagement and on-task behaviour. This ensures children and young people are 'available to learn' and have the potential to achieve better outcomes through physical, cognitive and affective development. Physical literacy is unique to each individual and considered fundamental for a child and young person's health and wellbeing as well as playing a key role in facilitating academic achievement.

In 2000 a Welsh task force outlined a number of key actions required to improve standards of PE across Wales. As a result the PE and School Sport (PESS) Programme was set up and managed by Sport Wales (funded by the Welsh Government in 2001) and continued until 2014. The primary aim for the programme was to ensure that 'every young person is challenged and supported in PE and school sport'. PESS focused on up skilling the practitioners. High quality provision across curricular, extracurricular and community activity helps to engage children and young people, providing them with positive activity experiences and the skills, confidence and motivation to be 'hooked on sport' for life. The PESS project has developed a suite of professional development courses and resources to support practitioners working with 3 to 19-year-olds (Foundation Phase to Key Stage 4 and above).

Delivery was managed and supported by expert regional consortia teams with an understanding of physical literacy and the ways in which it can be achieved and improved through the curriculum and the wider community. PESS interventions investigated the potential value of using the physical to create and enhance meaningful learning and improve academic achievement through movement. This approach allowed for the creation and development of bespoke, holistic and child-centred interventions driven by need (as opposed to a 'one-size fits all' approach). Dragon Multi-Skills and Play to Learn developed wide reaching and extensive activities which were used as facilitative vehicles, accepting that the stage of development was more important than age.

The bespoke evolutionary nature of PESS has provided an excellent foundation for the new Physical Literacy Programme for Schools (PLPS). The primary focus of PLPS is to create engaging opportunities that meet the needs of every child, helping them to fulfil their full potential.

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Context (Cont.....)

In conjunction with the PLPS a newly developed Physical Literacy Framework (PLF) will provide practitioners with clear expectations that will help track the progress of every child along their physical literacy journey. The implementation of the PLF across Wales will raise the importance of developing a physically literate nation. However, the need to independently collate, review, analyse and evaluate the PESS evidence base and the introductory phase of the PLPS in raising standards across physical literacy, academic achievement and whole school outcomes is paramount.

SPEAR

In October 2014, the Centre for Sport, Physical Education and Activity Research (SPEAR) at Canterbury Christ Church University was commissioned by Sport Wales to independently review the evidence base for the Physical Education and School Sport Programme (PESS), the Physical Literacy Programme for Schools (PLPS) and the Physical Literacy Framework (PLF). Part of this independent review involves the collation, review, selection, secondary analysis and innovative presentation of case studies evidencing and sharing a range of best practice across PESS and PLPS initiatives. As such, the narrative and analysis of this case study has been conducted by SPEAR with the resources provided by Sport Wales. Consent to identify children, adults and organisations within this case study has been granted.

SPEAR is a cross school and cross faculty research centre at Canterbury Christ Church University established to bring together expertise across and outside the university and to facilitate collaborative working. In particular, SPEAR brings together expertise in Sport and Exercise Science, Physical Education, Education, Health and Tourism and Leisure. SPEAR's research has helped guide and inform public policy to increase physical activity and sport participation among young people by identifying the processes most successful in increasing participation. It has provided a rationale for government investment, contributed to the wider evidence base used by policy makers, and steered programme improvements that enhance physical activity opportunities and experiences.

More details on SPEAR and its work can be found at:

www.canterbury.ac.uk/SPEAR

Reading Buddies

Raising reading standards through sport-themed mentoring

Profile

The use of cross-age peer mentoring in schools (older children mentoring younger children) has proliferated in recent years. Schools have utilised cross-age peer mentoring or 'buddy systems' mentoring to address the educational and employment needs of their young people and to help them overcome educational and personal barriers (Bartlett, 2012). Successful programmes have in common the idea of a trusting relationship that involves a more experienced person acting as a role model, helping someone less experienced (DuBois, et al. 2011). The buddy system has potential to serve as an exemplary positive youth development programme impacting on social skills, school and peer connectedness and self-esteem of both mentees and mentors (Karcher et al. 2010). Llantwit Major Comprehensive School wanted to explore the use of sport leaders as mentors/buddies to engage younger boys in reading.

The Challenge: What was the problem?

Llantwit Major Comprehensive School was keen to explore the ways in which Physical Education and sport could support the national drive to improve literacy standards. In particular the school wanted to investigate the impact of a sustained reading programme on the literacy skills of boys identified with low reading ages. This was seen as an opportunity to raise the profile of the PE department within the school and provide a model for other departments to use. The head of PE wanted to demonstrate to the senior management team that a national priority (literacy) could be successfully addressed through cross departmental working using PE and sport as the driver for change. The school intended to develop a reading buddies programme that would increase the boys' engagement in reading a variety of books and improve their reading levels.

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The Intervention: What did they do?

The school created a reading club for boys in years 7 and 8 who had been identified as having low reading ages and low self-confidence. The intervention was targeted at twenty boys, ten from each year group. 17 of the boys had scored 95 or less on a national standardised reading test and 3 boys were observed to have low confidence levels. Teachers had observed that the boys reading age and low confidence prevented them from fully accessing the full curriculum, including PE.

The reading club used a variety of books (factual and fictional) which had a sporting theme to encourage the boys to engage in and enjoy reading. The lead teacher spent time researching the most appropriate and engaging books and stories with a sporting context to use throughout the programme. The boys were asked if they would like the opportunity to work with older boys (mentors/buddies) in a 'boys only' reading club; importantly they were informed that the club would be delivered by the mentors/buddies without teachers being present. Parents were fully informed, engaged and supportive of the programme. Ten boys from years 10 and 11 who were young sports leaders were identified to act as peer mentors and buddies in the scheme. The mentors/buddies were chosen on the basis of their commitment and determination to complete tasks to a high level, as observed in their roles as sports leaders. It was deemed essential that the readers had consistent mentors/buddies throughout the intervention. Following a training session, in which the mentors were provided with a variety of strategies to support their mentee, the mentors were introduced to the mentees and all assigned 'buddies'. The school established two reading rooms specifically for the reading club and the boys were split equally between each room to reduce noise without creating a 'library' atmosphere.



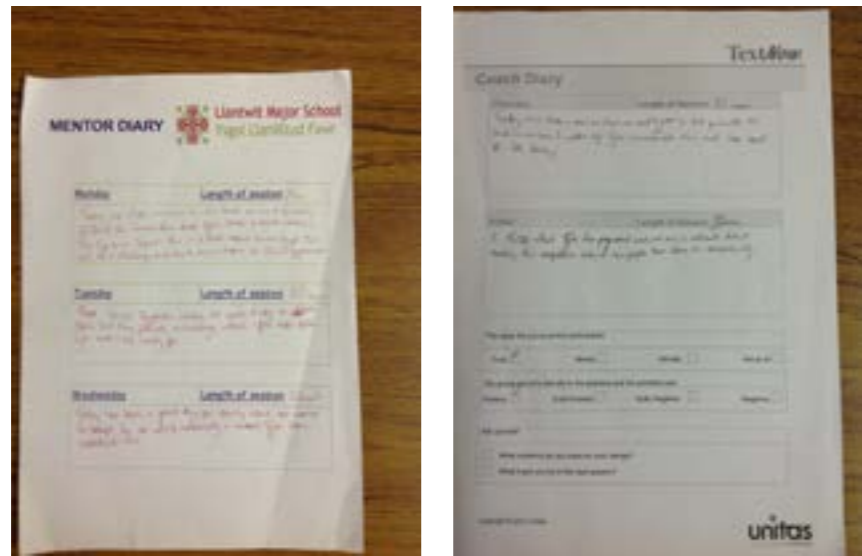
Reading buddies: the mentors are working with their mentees/buddies and recording their progress

Reading Buddies

The Intervention: What did they do?

The boys read with their mentor/buddy for 20 minutes every day for ten weeks. The mentors provided support and guidance by building confidence and assisting boys with difficulties they experienced using a variety of strategies, such as decoding words and giving contextual clues. Registers were taken to monitor attendance and each learner had their own daily log in which mentors and buddies could note any difficulties the reader was experiencing, as well as progress they were making against their reading strategies. The daily log allowed progress to be monitored at an individual level.

At the end of the intervention another national standardised reading test was administered, the results of which were compared to the results of the previous baseline measure test. Video and audio evidence exploring both learner and mentor thoughts and feelings were also collected at baseline and post intervention. Collectively these measures were used to assess the impact of the intervention.



Sample of mentor and coach diary forms

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Impact: What changed for the young people?

All twenty readers completed at least one book within the intervention period. Those who had completed their book before the end of the intervention began reading another book of their choice. Of the readers selected on the basis of their low reading age, all increased their reading age (by between 0.3 and 2.6 years) over the period of the intervention. The boys selected on the basis of low confidence maintained their baseline reading age. Teachers and mentors observed increases in the confidence and self-esteem not only of these boys but of all readers taking part in the intervention. At the end of the ten weeks the learners were allowed to take home another book of their choice to encourage the continuance of independent reading.

Through the mentoring process the year 10 and 11 mentors/buddies became seen as role models across the whole school. Each mentor was rewarded with an Amazon voucher for their hard work and commitment. Teachers observed a positive impact on the focus and motivation of all learners involved, both mentors and buddies.



Reading buddies working together (click picture to play video)



Reading buddies working together (click picture to play video)



Reading buddies from a mentor's perspective (click picture to play video)

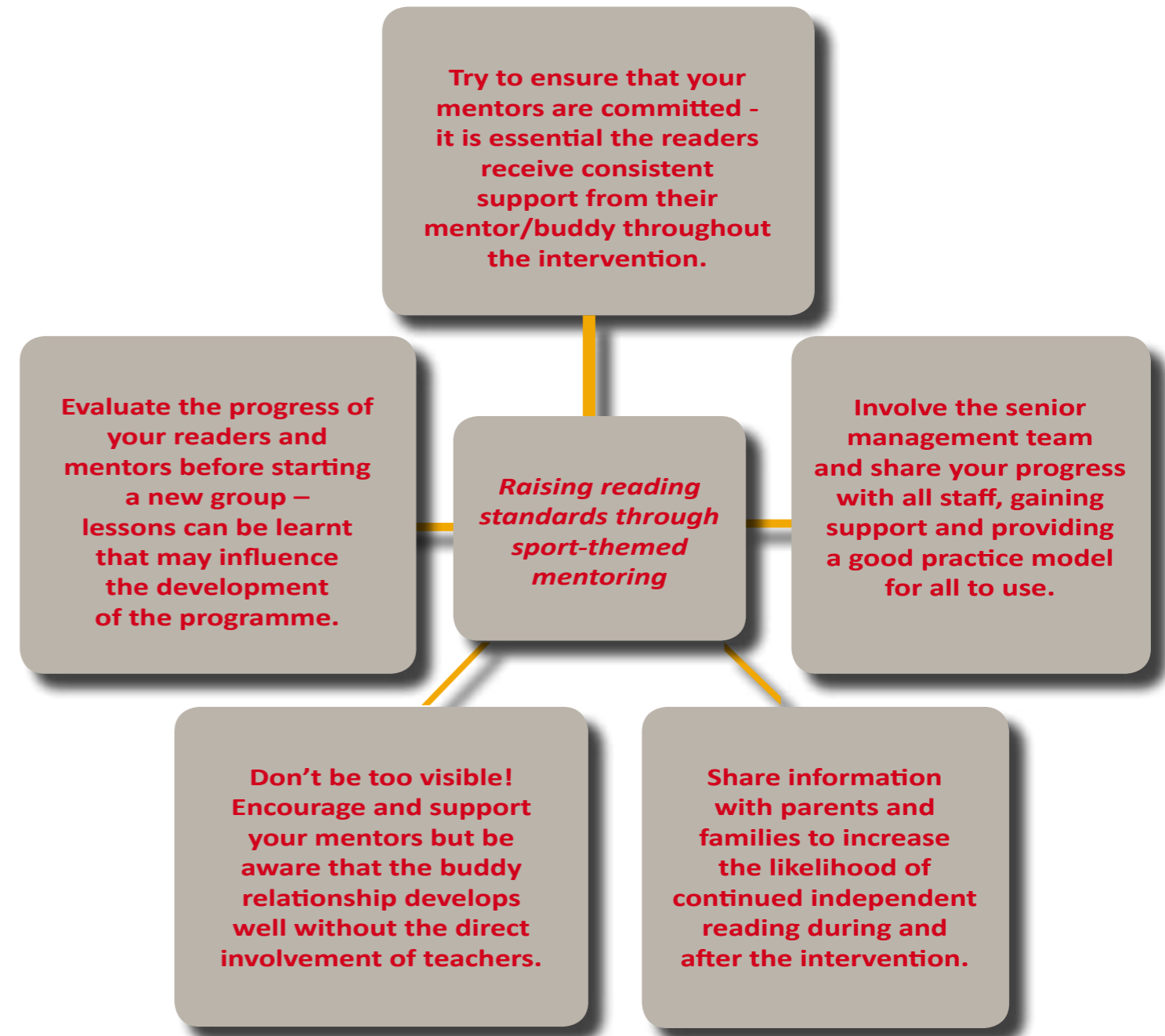
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Impact: What changed for Llantwit Major Comprehensive School?

The school believes that the implementation of a new way of working to improve literacy has resulted in active, happy, confident and literate learners. Demonstrating the PE department's ability to drive and develop literacy levels, in line with the national priority, raised the profile of the department. The intervention offered an opportunity to showcase the young sports leaders as role models with diverse skill sets to the whole school. As a result of the success of the intervention the school is continuing to run the reading buddies programme with new readers and new mentors/buddies.

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Recommendations: Advice for schools and practitioners



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