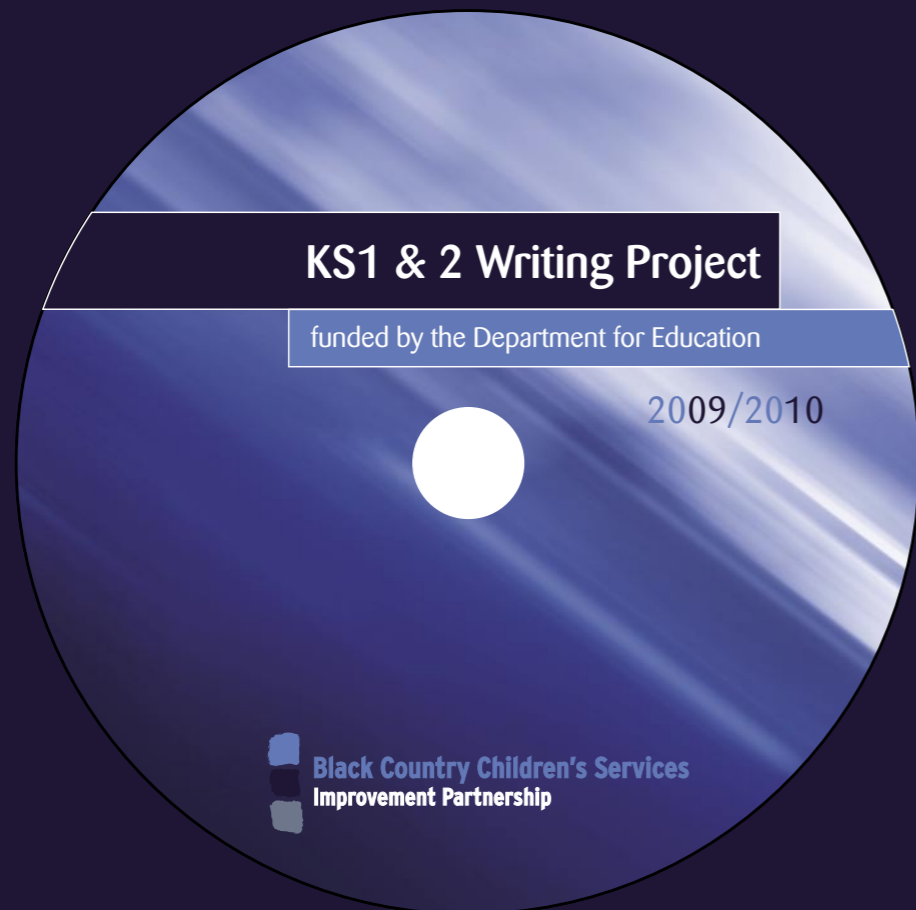


2009/2010

KS1 & 2 Writing Project

funded by the Department for Education



Contents

.....	Introduction	4
.....	Background to the Project	5
.....	What they Say	6
.....	The Impact of the Project	7
.....	Typical Features of Experiential Units	10
.....	10 Steps to Planning a Unit	11
.....	Examples of Experiential Units	12
.....	Brief Overviews of Experiential Units	15
.....	Case Studies	17
.....	Resources	23
.....	Staff Meeting Resources	24
.....	The Giant's Letter	28
.....	Appendices	29

Thank you

The authors of this booklet and providers of the Black Country Challenge KS1 & 2 Writing Project, Gill Matthews and Stephanie Austwick, would like to thank all of the teachers and pupils involved for their enthusiasm, commitment and ideas.

Dudley

Alder Coppice Primary School
Belle Vue Primary School
Brierley Hill Primary School
Red Hall Primary School
Thorns Primary School
Wallbrook Primary School

Sandwell

Albert Pritchard Infant and Wood Green Junior School
Bearwood Primary School
Brickhouse Primary School
Christ Church Primary School
Devonshire Junior School
Park Hill Primary School

Walsall

Abbey Primary School
Edgar Stammers Primary School
Pinfold Street JMI Primary School

Wolverhampton

Corpus Christi Primary School
Elston Hall Primary School
Fallings Park Primary School
St Andrews CE Primary School
St Bartholomew's Primary
St. Jude's CE Primary School
Woden Primary School
Wood End Primary School

Also, a huge thanks to literacy consultants Tracey Powell and Zoe Potter (Dudley), Sandy Moran (Walsall) and Val Beswick and Michele Alpanis (Wolverhampton) for their belief, support and input.

Introduction

The Black Country Challenge Key Stage 1 & 2 Writing Project was carried out with teachers from 30 schools from across the four Black Country Local Authorities: Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton, during the 2009/2010 academic year. It built on a highly successful model developed during the previous year with a smaller group of schools.

The Black Country Challenge was one of three City Challenges (the others being London and Manchester), funded by the Department for Education (formerly known as the Department for Children, Schools, and Families). The Challenge aimed to improve the quality of teaching and learning in order to raise attainment in Black Country Schools.

The Black Country Challenge Key Stage 1 & 2 Writing Project was delivered and evaluated by Gill Matthews, an independent education consultant working with the Black Country Challenge, and Stephanie Austwick, the West Midlands Regional Adviser for literacy with the Primary National Strategy. The project was managed and administered by Black Country Children's Services Improvement Partnership.

This booklet offers background information on the Writing Project, evidence of impact, ideas and resources for developing stimulating and creative units of work and material for running whole school In Service Training on an experience-based approach to teaching writing.

The accompanying CD contains the PowerPoint slides on pages 24 - 27 and Appendices 2 and 3.

Background to the Project

Our main aim in running the project was to improve the quality of pupils' writing by involving them in direct and motivating experiences, thus giving them something to write about. In the earlier model, we had seen this approach, combined with quality first teaching, motivate children as writers and lead to higher attainment in writing.

Each school was invited to send two class teachers to an initial workshop, held during the autumn term, at which we introduced and explained the project. The teachers took part in a brief experience themselves. This involved writing letters to the wife of the giant in Jack and the Beanstalk, persuading her to come home following her untimely departure with a local troll. Teachers were also supported in planning and developing their own experiential units of work, using a three-phase teaching and learning model (Appendix 1). These units were then delivered during the spring term. They lasted between two to six weeks and were frequently extended as teachers and children spotted more opportunities to write. In some cases the experiences were rolled out across a Key Stage and even a whole school. The teachers attended a second workshop in the summer term in order to share their experiences and their units. These were varied and imaginative and included mysterious objects appearing in the classroom, real (and virtual) visitors communicating with the children, trips out of school and alien space craft landings in school. They all had a common element – the children were writing for authentic purposes and for authentic audiences.

At the second workshop, teachers engaged in their own lengthier experience. They entered the room in semi darkness to find Red Riding Hood's granny's cottage illuminated in one corner. Music played, books were read, film followed and Granny herself told of her pride in her granddaughter. She explained that today was an important day as Wolf was on trial for his various exploits. Suddenly, an email flashed up on screen, the editor of the Once Upon a Times newspaper was in urgent need of extra journalists to create a special edition, celebrating Wolf's trial. A courier arrived with briefs for the articles and teams of journalists set about fulfilling those briefs. The whole experience lasted for about 45 minutes. Not one 'journalist' questioned their writing task. They produced perfectly formed and

worded newspaper articles. Mick Waters, former curriculum director at QCA and Visiting Professor at University of Wolverhampton, arrived at the start of the experience 'to see what all the fuss is about' and he saw, and he wrote, and he became involved in a real writing experience. Granny was less easy about his presence; 'The first time I meet Mick Waters and I'm wearing a grey wig and shawl!' she bemoaned. She's recovering - slowly.

The Red Riding Hood experience that we had planned for this second workshop gave us serious pause for thought. Would the teachers go along with it? Would they carry out their given writing tasks?

Would they stay in role? It was interesting to observe the teachers as they entered the room. It was dark, the focus was on Granny's cottage corner. Nobody out of role was giving any instructions or directions and yet those teachers knuckled down to their various writing tasks, under strict time constraints and produced extremely effective and creative pieces of journalism. One rule that we learned was that having trust is all powerful. The teachers knew us, knew the way we worked and they knew the whole mode and method of experiential learning. Learners need to be able to trust their teachers for effective learning to take place. As the second workshop unfolded and we heard from the teachers about the children's responses to the experiential units, we realised that the Black Country Challenge KS1 & 2 Writing Project had met and surpassed its aims. The teachers were clear that children were writing more effectively, more appropriately and more efficiently. They were aware of the impact of the purpose and audience of their writing and, above all, they were enjoying it.



What they Say...

“The children have been more motivated to write (particularly the boys). It has given them an audience and purpose and this is so important.”

“This is a tool to make writing more meaningful and purposeful.”

“Parents have commented on the positive impact of the activities, particularly about the engagement of their children.”

“This is benefiting children’s lives.”

“The approach has made me very aware of many opportunities that I have missed previously. It helps to add another dimension to my teaching and makes it exciting to deliver.”

“This has given me renewed enthusiasm for teaching literacy.”

“This has made me far more aware of how to teach and motivate the children.”

“The most significant area of improvement is in children’s focus and engagement. Without exception, pupils have been more keen and excited to participate in lessons where this approach is used.”

“Things I have picked up from this approach have made a significant impact on writing generally and have allowed me to regain some of the fun of writing with my children.”

The Impact of the Project

Numbers tend to speak louder than words when it comes to research projects so, in order to collect quantitative data, pupils’ writing was assessed before and after the units, from at least six children in each class. In terms of qualitative data, pupils also carried out perception surveys (see Appendix 2) about themselves as writers and writing generally. Again, these were completed both before and after the units.

In terms of attainment, assessment data was received concerning a total of 258 children.

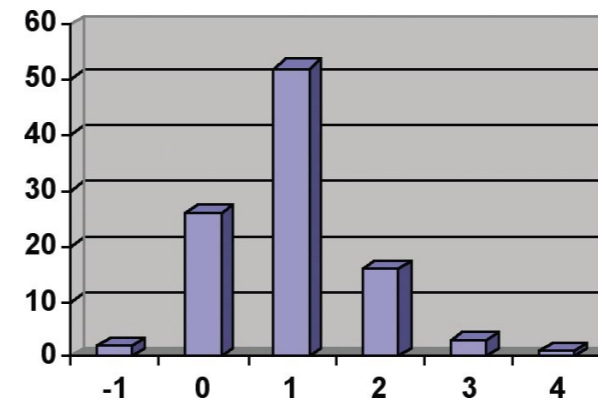


Figure 1
Sublevels of progress made by children in the Project.

As can be seen from Figure 1, following the delivery of the experiential units, over half of the children had made at least one sub level of progress and 4% had improved by a whole level or more. This exceeds expectations of normal progress of one whole level every two years, particularly as few of the units lasted longer than half a term. However, there were 28% of children who did not make any progress, indeed 2% dropped a sub level, so it’s possible that an experiential approach may not suit every child. It had been anticipated that the experiential learning approach would appeal more strongly to boys than girls but there was no evidence in the data of one gender making more progress than the other. We found that the children who did not respond well to the experiential learning approach tended to be those on the autistic spectrum: the whole notion of make believe was alien and could be confusing and structures and timings were far

too flexible for their needs. These children do need to be considered when planning this type of unit.

One of the questions on the pupil perception survey asked the children about their attitudes to writing in terms of whether they liked it.

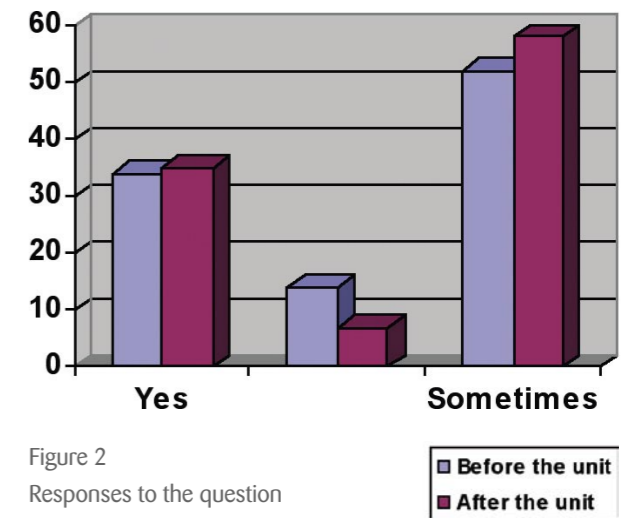


Figure 2
Responses to the question
'Do you like writing?'

The percentage of children responding positively to the question rose from 35% before the experiential units to 47% afterwards, with negative responses dropping by 10%. It was noticeable that the number of negative responses rose as children moved up through primary school. Significant numbers of Year 5 and 6 children responded ‘no’ or ‘sometimes’ compared to children lower down the school. It wasn’t unusual for 100% of Reception and Year 1 children to respond positively and fewer than 50 % of Year 5 and 6 children to respond negatively to that question.

Question:
What are we doing in our teaching of writing that turns children off the act of writing?

Reasons that children gave for not actively liking writing often focused on physical discomfort e.g. It makes my hand/ head/legs ache; I get sweaty and we can’t have the door open. There were also a number of references to the length of writing sessions e.g. sitting for too long, writing lots, long

writing. Some children referred to specific aspects of writing that they disliked such as spelling, punctuation, handwriting, putting connectives in, assessment writing and doing past SATs papers. They also mentioned lacking ideas and stimuli e.g. when you have to write something you're not interested in or don't know anything about, I run out of ideas. And for one unfortunate soul, his reason for disliking writing was Everything!

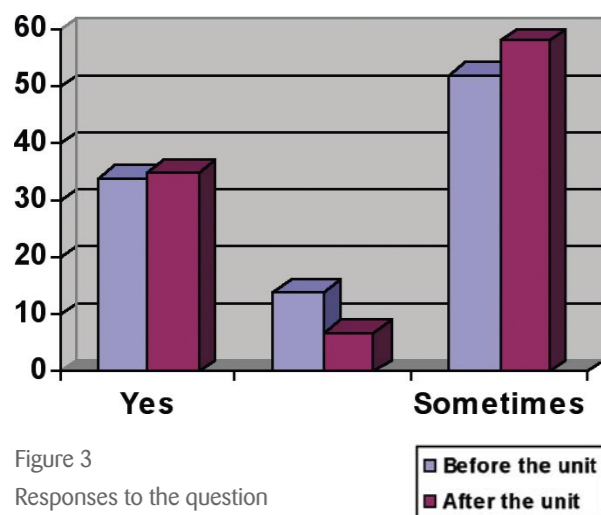


Figure 3
Responses to the question
'Are you a good writer?'

Children's responses to the question **Are you a good writer?** before and after the units demonstrated less of a shift to the positive. However, as one teacher said of one of his Year 4 pupils, 'She has made significant progress yet thinks she isn't a good writer. I think she now really knows what does make a good writer and feels that she isn't coming up to the mark. But she will'.

Following this question, children were asked what advice they would give to a child in the year below them to help them get better at writing. Both before and after the units, many children were preoccupied with spelling, punctuation and handwriting. The length of a piece of writing also appeared important to them. And of course, we should remember that children will be repeating the advice given to them from teachers and other adults. We came across one set of perception surveys where 75% of the children in the class advised *Sitting up straight with your legs under the table.*

Somewhat ashamed, the class teacher admitted that maybe he did overuse that particular piece of advice. Perhaps thinking more carefully about what we say to children about their writing is one lesson to be learned from the project.

Here is a selection of the advice made by children before the unit (admittedly cherry picked, but it does make the point):

- Write slanted
- Use a long, sharp pencil
- Do a writing test
- Write a hole side
- Use lots of hard words
- Have steady hands
- Meet your targets
- Up level your sentences

After the unit there were some very sound pieces of advice being given (again cherry picked):

- Put in lots of description
- Read examples and take like a line of a book and put in your own words
- It's the little things that make a difference
- Think first and plan what to write before you start writing
- Read the success criteria
- Be adventurous and creative and remember good words what you know
- Keep your readers interested
- Don't give up it will pay off one day

Not only did pupils complete a survey, so did the teachers who were involved in the project. The vast majority said that they enjoyed teaching writing, although many had some reservations about non fiction as they felt children were often confused by the various text types and that it could become rather worthy and dull. Frustrations, issues and challenges that the teachers felt that they faced in the teaching of writing included children's lack of imagination, experiences and language. These, the teachers believed, were holding children back in terms of writing ability. However, it was those very barriers that the Writing Project was aiming to break down and we believed it would.

Following the experiential units, most of the teachers felt that their pupils were more motivated as writers and enjoyed writing. As one teacher wrote, I have seen how having a clear audience and purpose makes a difference and offering real experiences supports and scaffolds pupils' writing greatly. Another said that, after teaching the unit, the best thing about teaching writing was Teaching new concepts, reinvigorating children's imaginations. Inspiring children to write. Her response before the unit had been Developing skills. She was hooked and she wasn't alone. Every single teacher involved in the project was enthusiastic, motivated, inspired apparently (in a number of cases) about the experiential learning approach. Not only did it have an impact in their own classrooms but also on others in the school. Several teachers told us that, across their schools, they were changing how they planned and taught writing: by building in experiences; making cross curricular links; giving children the opportunities to lead their learning and by being flexible in terms of timing and planning.

Hopefully, you too are now interested in using the experiential learning approach and want to know more. The following sections give a wealth of advice on planning units, ideas for experiences and case studies written by some of the class teachers who took part in the project. The examples and ideas given have been drawn, not only from the Black Country Challenge Project, but also from others that we've been involved with, across the West Midlands and nationally.

Typical Features of Experiential Units

Following feedback from teachers on their experiential units, a list of common and key elements began to emerge.

Successful units started with an engaging opening event or experience that 'hooked' the children into the unit. This could be a gradually introduced experience, such as a Victorian dress being left in the classroom by a young mill worker of that era, then a basket of cakes and finally a letter explaining who she was and that she was desperate for help to escape from the drudgery of the mill. Or, it could be a more dramatic event such as the explosive arrival of the main character from the book *Kensuke's Kingdom* by Michael Morpurgo, played by a member of a local theatre company. However, these opening events don't have to be costly or time consuming. Sometimes, the simpler the event the better. In a Year 2 class, the mere appearance of the Gruffalo's footprints in the classroom sparked off a lively unit around Julia Donaldson's award winning series of books based on that character.

Occasionally, during the planning and development of a unit, false starts were made and blind alleys explored, as teachers tussled with creating a lively and interesting context that could be sustained over a number of weeks. The children had to be engaged by the context and motivated to write by it. A small minority of teachers expressed concern about being seen to be lying to their pupils and that their streetwise 10 and 11 year olds wouldn't go along with the pretence.

Our argument is that most experiential units involve make believe and even if the children are quite certain that the situation being presented to them is not true, they are more than willing to go along with it.

As an example, one Year 6 teacher, let's call him Mr Smith, overheard a conversation between two of his pupils:

Child A:

I don't think this is real do you?

Child B:

Look, you know it isn't real, I know it isn't real, but Mr Smith thinks it is, so let's go along with it.

Plainly, for these children, the make believe was more exciting and interesting than the alternative. If we are concerned about lack of imagination among today's primary school children, let's foster and nurture that imagination through make believe.

One of the more challenging common elements in a unit was to have an unfolding narrative running through the unit that provided the children with authentic audiences and purposes for writing. This was the aspect that teachers found most difficult to create. In a meeting where a unit based around a shipwrecked crew making their dangerous way to shore was under development, one teacher was adamant that the children should write poetry about the power of the sea.

A frustrated colleague eventually asked *Why?*

*Why would they write poems when all around them crew and passengers are struggling to survive? At this very obvious question, the staff dissolved into laughter and realised that the main questions that they had to keep asking were *Why are the children writing?* and *Who are they writing for?**

Generally, having a series of communications between a key character and the children provided the necessary narrative. The communications came in many forms: letters; emails; phone calls; video conferences and through the use of animation software such as *Crazy Talk* (see Resources section). These communications set children research tasks, problems to be solved and, above all, meaningful writing activities. Eliza, the Victorian mill worker mentioned earlier, communicated by letter asking the children to write to the mill owners in order to persuade them to release her. These proved to be successful and she went on to tell them that she had taken a job as a scullery maid and started to leave items in the classroom that related to her new job. The children then produced 21st Century style adverts promoting their uses and benefits. As the narrative unfolded, the children wrote letters, postcards, notes and descriptions. The unit culminated in a visit to a local Victorian house where they discovered a final and farewell letter from Eliza. Most of the units had an ultimate and main written outcome where the children were taught the skills they needed for the task but there were many other opportunities for incidental writing

along the way – some planned for, others that emerged from the children's ideas.

In some of the experiential units, teachers provided opportunities for children to work in role. They were recruited as journalists, researchers, scientists, ghost hunters, writers and members of a theatre production company. These units echoed the Mantle of the Expert approach (see Resources section) although did not necessarily have the 'enterprise' aspect that this approach advocates.

Finally, literacy had to be at the heart of every unit. The focus was on equipping the children with the necessary skills to write in an appropriate style, tone and form for the identified purpose and audience. And, let's face it, those are the key skills for any writer, of any age and ability, in any situation.

Typical features:

- an engaging opening event or experience that 'hooks' the children into the unit
- a lively and interesting context that can be sustained over a number of weeks
- an unfolding narrative
- authentic audiences and purposes for writing
- opportunities for children to work in role
- literacy at the heart of the unit

10 Steps to Planning a Unit

There are no hard and fast rules to creating and developing an experiential unit but you should find these steps helpful.

Points 1 to 4 are really quite interchangeable as you might have an idea for a wonderful opening experience and that becomes your starting point. Or, you may want to develop a unit based around World War II, so this will provide the context.

Essentially, if you have an idea that excites you, start there. Appendix 3 provides you with a planning proforma to support the development of an experiential unit.

1. Identify the key types of writing that you want to teach.
2. Identify learning objectives for the unit.
3. Establish the context and create the hook or opening experience.
4. Develop the unfolding narrative that will hold the unit together.
5. Identify the major written outcomes, along with authentic audiences and purposes for the writing.
6. Identify any incidental writing opportunities, along with authentic audiences and purposes.
7. Establish what needs to be explicitly taught and what the children already know.
8. Create a medium term plan that gives you an overview of the unit and an idea of its length
9. Explore venues for visits, source artefacts, book theatre groups – whatever you need to bring the unit to life.
10. Create weekly plans for the first two or three weeks of the unit but be prepared to be flexible.

Examples of Experiential Units

Year Group 1	Term 1
MAIN TYPES OF WRITING TO BE TAUGHT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instructions • Labelled diagrams • Story - own version of a traditional tale, sequencing events and using complete sentences.
CONTEXT	Traditional Tales
OPENING EVENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children arrive in class one morning to find their classroom has muddy 'wolf prints' all over it. What could have happened? They help to clean up. • Next morning – same again. Very puzzling! • Third morning – same again, but this time a note written in very shaky handwriting. It explains that he is the 'Big Bad Wolf' from the stories but he really isn't big or bad. He needs some help. He is always getting into trouble, doing the wrong thing, upsetting people and he hasn't got any friends. What should he do?
NARRATIVE IDEAS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wolf could continue dialogue of notes appearing in classroom – asking questions or requesting help (see written outcomes). • Computer software, eg Crazy Talk, could bring wolf to life in the classroom – talking to the children. • Another character could send an email, telling them about the wolf and what they think the children should get him to do to make friends in Storyland. • Head teacher could come into classroom with a letter from the Mayor of Storyland, thanking the children for all their help in solving some of the problems. Now there is another problem...
WRITTEN OUTCOMES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recipes for making rice crispie cakes to give to Little Red Riding Hood, to say sorry. • Labelled diagrams of other presents he could give to characters. • Labelled diagram - What makes a good friend? • Letters he could write to characters, apologising for his behaviour and asking to make friends. • A story about the wolf and his new friends. • Notes to the wolf, asking questions about the other characters in Storyland. • Instructions for games he could teach his new friends. • Letters/notes to other characters • Posters in support of the wolf
CROSS CURRICULAR ASPECTS	Science – cooking recipes Geography – map making PSHE - friendships Art – drawing and labelling Celebration of learning
CELEBRATION OF LEARNING	Plan and hold a Storyland Party. Invite the wolf with all his new friends. Encourage the children to dress up as characters from Traditional Tales. Play games using the instructions written by the children. Follow some of the recipes and make food for the party. Have fun!

Year Group 4	Term 1
MAIN TYPES OF WRITING TO BE TAUGHT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Longer story, written in chapters • Character profiles • Setting descriptions • Play-scripts • Instructional writing
CONTEXT	Stories set in imaginary worlds
OPENING EVENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils visit local forest school, conservation area, park, or simply walk around the school grounds. • They have been asked to help by clearing the litter so go armed with litter-pickers, black bags etc. • Eventually they discover a, well-hidden, glass bottle. • Teacher is suitably horrified that someone has thrown a glass bottle into the pond etc. • On closer inspection, children discover a note inside and take it back to the classroom to discuss. • Unfortunately the ink has run and only a few words are decipherable, leading to all sorts of speculation.
NARRATIVE IDEAS	Further notes appear in the same area, giving more and more information about the character and the 'world'. These could drive the types of writing eg. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further clues about the character • Information about the 'world' • Introduction of other character(s) • Introduction of a dilemma/quest/ evil character. Main character needs help to solve mystery, etc. • A director wants to make a film set in this amazing world. • Final letter from character, thanking them for their help.
WRITTEN OUTCOMES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Character profile • Setting descriptions • Instructional writing – offering advice, eg how to trap a Gramador! • Story set in the imaginary world using the characters, setting and info • A play-script, using the characters, setting and info – could be turned into a short film, an animation or a puppet show.
CROSS CURRICULAR ASPECTS	Science – the environment Art – drawing/painting – characters, settings DT – models of characters or worlds Drama – act out play-scripts IT – Film plays, or animate using plasticine characters/ puppets and paintings of settings.
CELEBRATION OF LEARNING	Make films/animations of stories set in Imaginary worlds. Hold a premiere to show the short films. Invite other classes to dress up and attend. Set up an art gallery, showing art work of the characters, settings, etc.

Year Group 6	Term 1
MAIN TYPES OF WRITING TO BE TAUGHT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Persuasive writing - leaflet Non - chronological report Recount - journalistic writing
CONTEXT	Revision of non-fiction text types – in context
OPENING EVENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (This needs prior negotiation with a local estate agent but could provide them with some great publicity!) Local estate agent visits the school. Needs some help. Very busy at the moment. Has an empty property, close to the school, which needs marketing. Produces a number of leaflets for properties currently on the market and asks them to produce similar ones for the property in question. When completed, these will be displayed in the estate agent's window. Pupils look at the leaflets and discuss the information. Class visit the property, with the estate agent, to gather the necessary information.
NARRATIVE IDEAS	<p>Estate agent emails class on a regular basis (written by teacher) and drives the learning and outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A young family is moving into the area. We need a report on the facilities within the local area. Particularly interested in what the school has to offer. A partially sighted couple have asked for an audio commentary for the property. A video presentation is needed for the website. The local newspaper is interested in finding out more about how the children are finding the role of estate agent.
WRITTEN OUTCOMES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Estate agent leaflet Non chronological report on local area New school prospectus Audio commentary Video presentation/photostory Article for the press - Recount of events – Estate agents are getting younger! etc
CROSS CURRICULAR ASPECTS	<p>Maths – measuring / scale floor plans Geography – maps, local area - facilities PSHE – community cohesion IT – creating leaflets, importing photographs, producing photostories or videos with commentaries</p>
CELEBRATION OF LEARNING	Leaflets are displayed in the Estate Agents window. The press are invited to attend as the children pose outside in their 'smart' estate agent attire.

Brief Overviews of Experiential Units

1 ROBIN HOOD – KS2

Clues left in classroom during previous week, eg. a green hat with feather, leather drawstring purse with old coins, 'tea-stained' notice stating that all outlaws will be punished, etc.

Artist in residence – prepare castle artefacts, eg. stained glass windows, suits of armour collages, paper mache hog's head, stones for working wall, etc. Forest scenery e.g. vines, an oak tree trunk, hessian money bags, leaves for working wall, etc.

When children arrive on Monday morning the environment has changed – castle/ forest. Explore the legend of Robin Hood.

Class visit – Morning – visit to castle, dungeons – senses; Afternoon – visit to woods, meet with ranger, build hide-outs. Back in the classroom, children receive a note from villagers. The Sheriff has taken everything. They need help.

2 THE EXPLORER - KS2

Monday morning – Tent appears outside classroom/on school field. No idea where it has come from or if there is anyone in it. On further investigation a number of clues are found inside e.g. a book about the Rainforest, some insect repellent, a map, a hammock, a compass etc. Subsequently an email is received, stating that the tent belongs to an explorer. He was forced to abandon his tent in a hurry and has gone on his travels to discover new species in the Rainforest. He will be in touch.

Pupils respond to regular messages/emails; find information for the explorer/ answer his questions e.g. What dangerous animals should I look out for? I've met a tribe in the forest, they enjoy telling stories set in forests but I'm not very good at making them up. Can you help me?

3 THE ALIEN IN THE CUPBOARD - KS1/2

Clues found around classroom e.g. bits of crashed spaceship/green slime. Eventually a green, rather shaky note from an Alien arrives. He is hiding, too frightened to meet the class, but needs to know about this world. Can they write back? He would like to try to copy some of the things that the children do e.g. build models, play a simple game. Can they leave instructions? Taped messages? Can they record messages back?

What are their homes like? He needs to tell them on his planet. Can they write poems to send back to his family?

4 THE TRAVEL SHOW – KS2

A visit from a travel agent. There is to be a competition. Groups of children must choose an important place in the world e.g. famous structures, capital cities, contrasting locations etc.

They must produce a number of outcomes to present at a travel show in three weeks time (the challenges may arrive on a regular basis) e.g. a fact sheet, a travel brochure, a photostory presentation with narration, a script for a lonely planet programme, advertising posters.

On the day of the Travel Show, the groups must set up their 'travel agency' and other classes may visit. Each visitor will place their golden ticket in the post box of their choice (secretly, of course!) Lots of prizes!

5 JACK AND THE BEANSTALK – KS1

Teacher brings in packet of beans linked to the 'growing things' project. Next day, packet is found ripped open and the beans have gone! Later in the week, a giant (paper) beanstalk has grown in the corner of the classroom.

Basket appears at the bottom of the beanstalk. Contains a letter from Jack, confessing to stealing. Explains that Giant is really quite friendly.

Regular messages from Jack with info or tasks e.g. a pair of magical boots appear. If you stand in them and close your eyes you can see the castle. You can describe it vividly. (One child saw it changing colour!)

So many different writing/ reading tasks could be taught through this classroom experience. The notes that appear from Jack drive these tasks. Sometimes, a giant note could appear from the Giant, or a message from another Traditional Tale character.

6 THE DRAGON'S EGG – KS1/2

An oversized egg mysteriously appears on a very large nest. What can it be?

The next day a note arrives explaining that the egg is the last dragon's egg in the land. The curator has been taken ill. It must be protected and nurtured at all cost.

Books appear on how to look after a dragon, Notes in code – ancient runes, challenges and requests.

Could lead to any type of writing and fiction texts about dragons.

Case Studies

CASE STUDY 1

Amy Griffiths - Year 4

Bearwood Primary School, Sandwell

I work in a large two form entry, multicultural, urban primary school which serves an area of high socio-economic deprivation. The percentage of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is significantly higher than average. Over half of the pupils are from homes where English is not the first language. The proportion of younger pupils who come from the Pakistani community has increased significantly recently. Across the school, the range of languages and ethnic backgrounds represented is very wide. Many children begin school with exceptionally low levels of skill and little or no English.

Over recent years it has become clear that there has been a dip in Literacy achievement across the school. In both reading and writing children are underachieving. Assessment data has highlighted the fact that boys, Pakistani boys in particular, are achieving lower results compared to their peers. Over the last year a number of changes and strategies have been implemented within the curriculum e.g. fortnightly Big Writing sessions, later increased to weekly sessions, introduction of weekly targets, a speaking and listening policy.

At the beginning of the year my class contained children with a range of academic abilities (from level 1b to 3a in writing) and 8 children with IEPs for behaviour and academic reasons.

Before the experiential unit I conducted interviews and questionnaires with children in my class. At the start of the year, 10 (out of 30) children said they didn't like writing in any subject, while 9 said they only liked writing when they were writing about subjects that interested them. Most children said they disliked writing because you had to write too much and it made their hands hurt. When asked what makes a good writer, children thought that the most important thing was having neat handwriting; very little thought was given to the content of their writing.

During the first part of the Spring term we were working on stories with historical settings and this was the first unit developed for the writing project. The time period that I decided to use was World War II. I decided this was the best setting to use as we were doing work in history on this time period and so this could feed in to the literacy work. Due to the limited knowledge and experience the children have of historical settings I thought that this unit could be difficult for the children to access. Linking the unit to the topic work and providing real experiences for the children meant they had more ideas to base their story on.

For the initial experience I decided to set up a 'ghost' scenario. I left items (teddy bear, gas mask) in the classroom before Christmas to get the children curious. I then set up the interactive whiteboard to write during the first literacy lesson after the Christmas holiday. Using the record facility on the IWB, this message appeared 'Can you see me? Can you help me? Where am I? My name's Edward'. We stopped the lesson and discussed how this message had appeared. The children came up with numerous scenarios (Bill Gates, teachers in the school, the technician, a ghost or a time traveller). The 'ghost' then continued to leave items, messages and photos to the children, revealing more about himself. The children found out what he looked like, who his parents were, where he lived, what he was like as a child,

how he found himself in the classroom. They were very excited when messages were left. Initially one or two children didn't want to play along but with the rest of the class on board, they soon followed and even started to tell other adults in the school. It was clear that the scenario was prompting a lot of discussion and speculation.

The final message resulted in the children writing their own stories set during World War II. They used Edward as the main character and used the plot that had unfolded in the classroom to write their story (a young boy who had been evacuated, decided to run back home because he missed his mother, on the way he heard the air raid siren, when he reached the shelter and stepped inside everything went dark. When he woke up he was in a strange classroom- how was he going to get home?)

During the lessons a number of incidental opportunities for writing arose. Initially, when Edward contacted us, the children decided to write a note back to him. They told him where he was and asked questions to find out more about him. Later, when Edward left notes about being evacuated, the children didn't know what this meant so they carried out some research in order to find out. A few children bought in posters about evacuations that they had made at home. Others wrote extra notes to send to Edward. Edward also asked us if we could send a letter to his mum telling her that he was safe. One boy even interviewed somebody he knew who had been evacuated, asking them if they knew anybody called Edward!

Making the writing come to life meant the children were eager and enthusiastic to write. I noticed that during the unit the children were less worried about their writing and concentrated more on the content and sentence construction. I feel that by linking history and literacy, as well as providing an experience, the children had so many more ideas to use in their writing. Their ideas flowed more easily because they weren't struggling with the plot which had been provided by the experiences in the classroom. Previously, when writing stories, the children had struggled to come up with decent plots due to their limited experiences. Combining the creative curriculum and the use of experience led learning resulted in the children having plenty of ideas at their finger tips.

After this first experiential unit I asked the children again whether they liked writing. This time none of the children said no. More children said that they sometimes liked writing and one of the boys, who had previously said no, said that he enjoyed writing. When asked what was important when writing, the children thought more about the content (an interesting plot, developing and writing about characters). The children were more interested than usual in writing during the unit and were more enthusiastic about writing straight after it.

Since implementing the first experiential unit, I have tried to start with, or include, an experience or authentic purpose and audience for writing in every literacy unit. As a school we have taken on board the medium term planning format (see Appendix 1), which every teacher completes before planning weekly lessons. It has meant teachers have a better understanding of the unit they are teaching and can see the bigger picture. The Black Country Challenge project has had a dramatic impact on Bearwood Primary School and it has now been rolled out across the whole school.

CASE STUDY 2

Zoë Rollinson, Advanced Skills Teacher - Year 5
Alder Coppice Primary School, Dudley

Writing is a whole school issue for Alder Coppice Primary School (ACPS) and had become one of the key points in our school improvement plan. Year 5: cohort 2011 had been identified as a particular year group with writing issues. The data highlighted a pattern emerging in boys, which indicated a lack of enjoyment and involvement in extended writing sessions, along with disengagement with reading. This last aspect appeared to not only affect the boys, but also the lower achievers within the class. Many of the children were not on target to reach age related expectations for the end of year SATs and had been identified as 'reluctant writers and readers'.

Since the last OFSTED in January 2008, ACPS had introduced many strategies intended to support and improve writing. These included a creative curriculum with 'Wow' days, where the children were involved in an event based around the year groups' theme; use of the Ros Wilson materials; a timetabled 'Big Write' slot for all classes and a new handwriting policy. However, we had identified that use of the Wow days as writing opportunities was under developed. Consequently, as a year group, we began to look for opportunities to develop these areas further. We were looking for guidance on planning a creative curriculum with reading and writing as the foundation. It was this idea that led me to the Black Country Challenge and the experiential writing project. Our initial training began in the Autumn term with a view to starting the project in the Spring term, when our topic would be the Ancient Greeks.

Our unit began with a link to the Olympics and was then developed through the story of the 'box'. The box appeared in both classrooms with a note asking for it not to be opened. The classes both debated whether to follow this advice. This session alone highlighted the impact an experience can have on engaging and motivating the children to discuss, debate, listen and then write. Each child was keen to write a letter explaining why the class had come to their decision. It is important to note that the classes had made different decisions. One class wanted to open the box. The other class was led to change their initial decision through strong persuasion from a boy (someone who struggles with the secretarial skills of writing) who explained, very clearly, that opening the box may have untold consequences.

This initial session was followed by an ICT research session where the children were asked to research stories about mystery boxes. As a result, they uncovered the story of Pandora's box. Both teachers and children decided that their boxes must be a gift from the god Zeus and were very likely to have magical powers.

As the term unfolded, gifts appeared in the box, clues and ideas were sent, resulting in the children deciding to hold a Greek party. They wrote letters to parents, inviting them to the party. They designed costumes with clear written instructions for making them, wrote their own version of Theseus and the Minotaur, and solved the problem of a double booked party venue. The simple but effective experience particularly helped to engage the boys. They responded very positively to the authentic, contextualised writing experiences.

The term ended with the children producing their own production for parents where they talked about their work during the term and the impact the magic box had had on their learning. One very reluctant writer wrote his own

version of a Greek myth so that he could read this out at the production. A group of boys decided to create a mock interview with an Olympic athlete. They wrote and developed scripts and practised speaking and listening before presenting to the parents.

The project was very successful and resulted in an increase in attainment for all children with some children improving by two sub-levels during the term. It also had a very positive effect on the children, creating more confident writers who were actively engaged in the writing process. We continued with the experiential writing approach for a further half term when the children completed a project about cars and were visited by the Stig from the TV programme Top Gear. This visit provided an opportunity for the whole school to become involved with an experiential writing day.

At the end of term a mock kidnap inspired children to complete a police incident report and to write letters persuading the kidnappers to release the teacher held. This experience was supported by community police who threw themselves wholeheartedly into the scenario.

The whole experiential writing project has left a considerable legacy. Year 6 staff now link English teaching units, the creative curriculum and as many experiences as possible. It has also increased my motivation when teaching English and has shifted the emphasis from teacher input to child initiated work. This has been really effective with the more reluctant writers, making them feel more engaged with their writing.

CASE STUDY 3

Alison O'Driscoll - Year 6

Christ Church C of E Primary School, Sandwell

The school is in an area of deprivation with many children from minority ethnic backgrounds with English as an additional language. We also find it challenging to engage and motivate boys. In my class, there were a high number of boys but the girls too were underachieving. It was for these reasons that we took part in the project.

The girls in the class generally liked writing, however the boys told me they hated literacy and that writing was boring. Some complained that their hand ached after a writing session. They also thought that the most important things about writing were handwriting, spelling and punctuation. The group of boys that I was going to monitor during the project were all working around levels 2a to 3c before the project started.

When I was planning the unit, I decided to revise recounts in forms of letters, diaries, biographies and news reports. I also wanted to cover instructions and poetry.

We had studied Romeo and Juliet in the second half of the Spring term and had looked at Macbeth, so the children had some understanding of the language. I decided that the hook into the unit would be the arrival of a mysterious package. The package contained a Venetian mask and an invitation for the Capulets' masked ball. The children decided that they all wanted to go to the ball and that they would have to design and make their masks. The children wrote their own RSVP in order to reply to the Capulets.

A few days later, the class received a letter from William Shakespeare who was very put out that he had not been invited to the masked ball. He asked the children to spy on Romeo and Juliet so that he could finish the scene in his play. With the letter were some pages stolen from Juliet's Diary which the nurse had tried to destroy. The children tried to work out what the rest of the page may have said, based on what they knew from the play. The boys decided they wanted to create Romeo's diary, whilst the girls decided to carry on Juliet's.

The day of the ball arrived. The children had learnt some Elizabethan dances and were in full swing when masked Juliet turned up (one of the teaching students we had in school at the time). The children asked her lots of questions and noted her answers. That afternoon they wrote to William Shakespeare, telling him what they had found out.

A few days later a strange bottle turned up from Friar Laurence. It was the sleeping potion for Juliet. The children wrote instructions for the mixture. In the final session of the unit, the children received a request from the editor of the Verona News, asking them to write a newspaper article about the death of the two star crossed lovers.

Meanwhile, along side all of this, the children were also organising a school trip to the Shakespeare Birthplace Museum in Stratford upon Avon. This involved writing letters and filling out booking forms. The museum had kindly agreed to join in with the experience and asked the children to redesign their leaflet on the life of William Shakespeare. The children were writing these in between the other elements I had planned. During the tour, the museum announced to the children which one they had liked the most.

When I interviewed the boys after the unit their attitudes had improved slightly. They realized that there was more to writing than just spelling and handwriting and that writing was done in response to something. The notion that writing had to engage the reader was also talked about, whereas before the unit this had not even been mentioned. One boy moved from level 2a to level 3a in one term. Most of the boys made 1 or 2 sub levels progress.

I think that getting other people involved worked really well. However, it really needs to be someone the children have not met. I used the student, who the children had seen around school, and some did try to spoil the illusion. I am currently teaching an experiential unit based around Oliver Twist with a mixed Year 5 and 6 class. This time I have used the Police and members of a Drama group who the children have not seen before and it has worked much better. Sometimes the children do not take the unit where you expected and it's important to let them run with some of their ideas. Flexibility is key. This has sometimes been difficult to get across, particularly to support staff who were used to having a weekly plan with everything accounted for. As a result of our involvement in the project, we now use experiential learning as a whole school approach to writing and we have radically changed the way we plan literacy.

Resources

ARTEFACTS

Terralec Ltd: suppliers of theatre props – very handy for making experiences seem real. www.props4shows.co.uk

Garden Centres: we have found that garden centres are an absolute treasure trove when it comes to finding objects for experiences – from giant sets of keys to dramatic masks.

Party goods suppliers: another good source of artefacts and also items to decorate classrooms. Try these websites but there are many more. www.partybox.co.uk, www.monsterparties.co.uk, www.noveltiesgalore.com (a particularly good source of masks).

SOFTWARE

Crazy Talk: animation software. For further information visit www.reallusion.com. Available in the UK from www.taglearning.com.

USEFUL WEBSITES

Mantle of the Expert: a dramatic-inquiry based approach to teaching and learning invented and developed by Professor Dorothy Heathcote. www.mantleoftheexpert.com

VENUES

Bantock House Museum,
Finchfield Road, Wolverhampton WV3 9LQ

Birmingham Back to Backs,
55-63 Hurst Street / 50-54 Inge Street, Birmingham B5 4TE

The Black Country Living Museum,
Tipton Road, Dudley DY1 4SQ
www.bclm.co.uk

Botanical Gardens,
Westbourne Road, Birmingham B15 3TR
www.birminghambotanicalgardens.org.uk

Dudley Zoological Gardens,
2 The Broadway, Dudley DY1 4QB
www.dudleyzoo.org.uk

Haden Hill House Museum and Park,
Halesowen Road, Cradley Heath B64 7JU

Oak House Museum,
Oak Road, West Bromwich B70 8HJ

Pendeford Nature Reserve,
Pendeford Hall Lane, Wolverhampton WV9 5ET

Sandwell Park Farm,
Salter's Lane, West Bromwich B71 4BG

Sea Life,
The Waters Edge, Brindleyplace, Birmingham B1 2HL
www.sealife.co.uk

Severn Valley Railway,
Kidderminster
www.svr.co.uk

Shakespeare's Houses and Gardens,
Stratford upon Avon
www.shakespeare.org.uk

West Midland Safari Park,
Spring Grove, Bewdley DY12 1LF
www.wmsp.co.uk


Wildside Activity Centre,
Hordern Road, Wolverhampton WV6 0HR

STAFF MEETING RESOURCES

These slides are also available on the disc that accompanies this booklet. They form the basis for a staff meeting on using experiences to stimulate writing. Please feel free to change them and make them your own.

1


Improving writing through experiential learning



3

Creating experiences


- Classroom based e.g. artefacts, letters, visitors, teacher/TA in role
- School based e.g. playground or field event
- Out of school e.g. visit or trip



2

What is this approach?


- Giving children: something to write about a context for their writing a purpose for their writing an authentic audience for their writing



4

Impact on teaching and learning


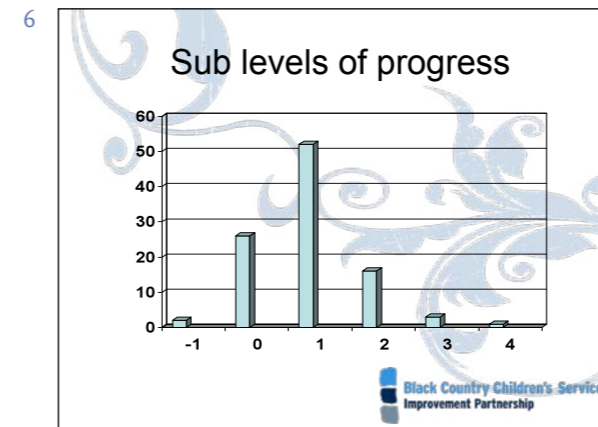
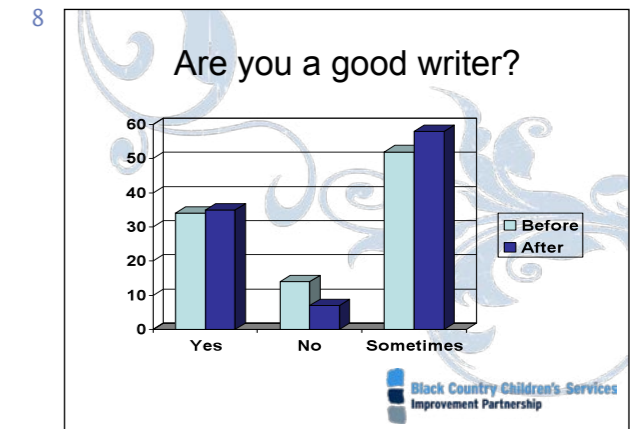
Evidence from projects



5

Data collection


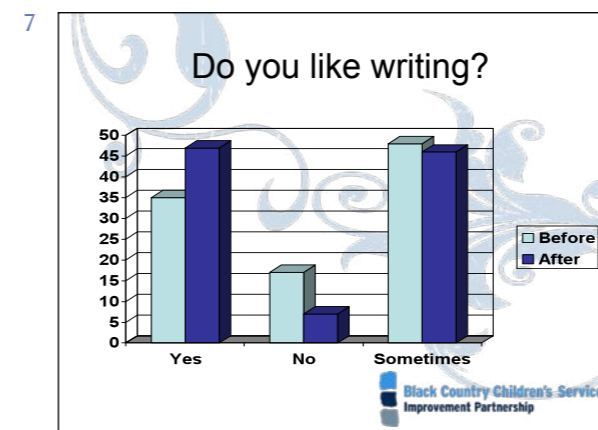
- survey data on pupils' perceptions of themselves as writers
- samples of pupils' writing and teacher assessments and commentaries.
- contextual information about the schools, classes, pupils and teaching unit
- teacher observations and evaluations

9

Dislikes about writing


- Doing it for too long
- Writing it up again
- Hand aches
- It makes my head ake
- I get sweaty and we can't have the door open
- Comprahenchun
- Punctuation
- Handwriting
- Everythink!

10

Advice for younger writers (before)

- Write slanted
- Use a long, sharp pencil
- Do a writing test
- Write a hole side
- Use lots of hard words
- Have steady hands
- Meet your targets
- Up level your sentences



11


Advice for younger writers (after)

- Put in lots of description
- Read examples and take like a line of a book and put in your own words
- It's the little things that make a difference
- Think first and plan what to write before you start writing
- Read the success criteria
- Be adventurous and creative and remember good words what you know
- Keep your readers interested
- Don't give up it will pay off one day



14


Planning experiential units



17

Phase 1: reading

- Immersion
- Analysis
- Reading as a writer



20

Phase 3: Writing – teaching strategies


- Modelled writing
- Shared writing
- Scaffolded writing
- Independent writing



12

Impact on children and learning


- Motivated
- Excited
- Confident
- Involved
- Awareness of audience
- Wanting to write
- Writing at home
- Independent
- Attendance improved



15

Key elements of the experiences

- an engaging opening event or experience that 'hooks' the children into the unit
- a lively and interesting context that can be sustained over a number of weeks
- an unfolding narrative
- authentic audiences and purposes for writing
- opportunities for children to work in role
- literacy at the heart of the unit



18

Phase 2: Speaking & Listening


- Capturing ideas
- Drama
- Oral rehearsal



21

Discrete literacy teaching


- Reading
 - Phonics
 - Guided reading
 - Class picture books/ novels linked to experience
- Word and sentence level work
 - Spelling
 - Punctuation
 - Grammar
 - Sentence construction



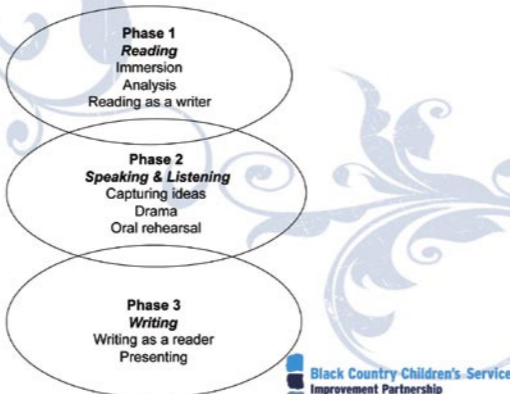
13

Impact on teachers and teaching

- Raised awareness of how to teach
- How to engage the children
- Getting children to think about impact of writing
- Audience and purpose
- Will continue this approach
- Impact of TFW
- More flexible planning
- Cross curricular links
- Aware of previous missed opportunities




16



Phase 1
Reading
Immersion
Analysis
Reading as a writer

Phase 2
Speaking & Listening
Capturing ideas
Drama
Oral rehearsal


Phase 3
Writing
Writing as a reader
Presenting



19

Phase 3: Writing


- Writing as a reader
- Presenting



22

Over to you

- Develop the outline of an experience (cross curricular/stand alone?)
- Link in literacy (more than one written outcome?)
- Add in incidental writing
- Make cross curricular links

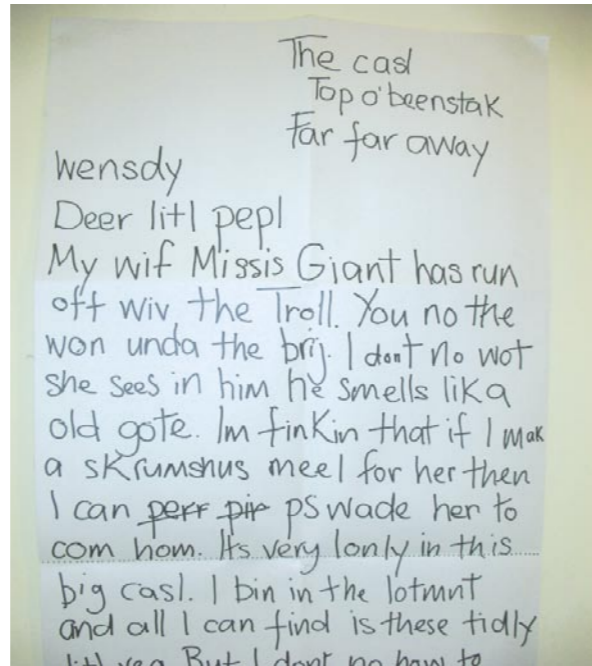


We tend to build an experience into staff meetings and school training sessions. These vary in terms of ambitiousness, often depending on how well we know the staff, how much preparation time we have and how much space there is available. Here is a suggestion for a fairly modest experience but if you have another idea then do use it.

THE GIANT'S LETTER

In advance of the meeting, get hold of some lining paper – the sort that is used to line walls underneath wall paper. It is sold in DIY shops and is pretty cheap. Source some giant artefacts. We've used giant vegetables, enormous sets of keys and an oversized cup and saucer for this experience.

Basically, you are going to produce a letter from the giant in Jack and the Beanstalk. It will explain that the giant has some sort of problem with his wife and that he needs some help in persuading her to do something. Write the letter in thick felt tip pen on the lining paper, using the hand you don't normally write with. Include a few spelling mistakes and try to inject some humorous elements. Make some sort of reference to the giant artefacts and make sure that you identify the writing task that the giant would like some help with, the purpose of the task and the audience for the task. If you trim the top and bottom of the lining paper with pinking shears, you can get away with saying that it is giant loo roll – nothing like a bit of toilet humour to get things going! Display the letter, addressed to 'The litl peep!' alongside the giant artefacts. Explain to your audience that you found these things when you came into the room and read the letter aloud. Encourage your audience to work in pairs or small groups to discuss and then complete the writing task. Ask some groups to read their writing and explore how the experience helped them with the writing task. Draw out from the discussion the importance of an identified audience and purpose as well as the elements of fun and enjoyment.

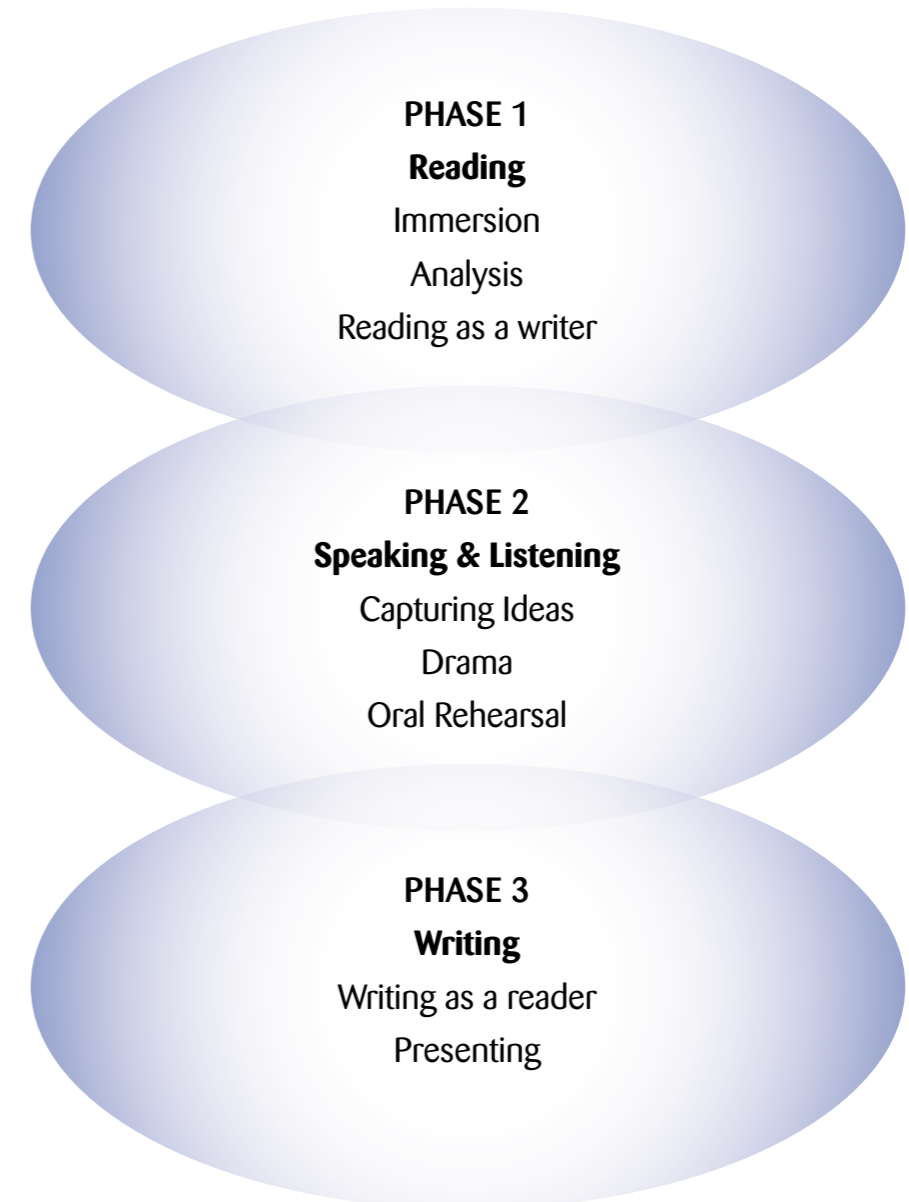


The experience could take place at the beginning of the session before you have introduced the concept of experiential units, or part way through. Sometimes, adults are thrown by an experience coming completely out of the blue, so plan the timing carefully.



Appendices

APPENDIX 1 Three-phase planning model



APPENDIX 2

Pupil perceptions survey

School name:			
Pupil name:			
Gender:		Year group:	
1. Do you like writing?	Yes	No	Sometimes
2. Is there anything you don't like about writing?			
3. Are you a good writer?	Yes	No	Sometimes
4. What advice would you give to someone in the year below you to help them get better at writing?			
5. Can you remember a piece of writing that you did when you were younger that you were particularly proud of? Why was that?			
6. What's the best piece of writing you've done recently? What was good about it?			
7. Do you ever write at home for pleasure? If so, what do you write?			
8. Do you ever draw at home?	Yes	No	Sometimes
9. Does anyone else write or draw at home?			
10. Is there any particular kind of writing you enjoy more than others?			

At the end of the project, please ask questions 1 – 4 again.

APPENDIX 3

Planning proforma

Year Group	Term
MAIN TYPES OF WRITING TO BE TAUGHT	
CONTEXT	
OPENING EVENT	
UNFOLDING NARRATIVE	
WRITTEN OUTCOMES	
CROSS CURRICULAR ASPECTS	
CELEBRATION OF LEARNING	

Black Country Challenge

KS1 & 2 Writing Project 2009/2010

Address: PA103, BCCSIP, Wolverhampton Science Park, Glaisher Drive, Wolverhampton, WV10 9RU.

Telephone: 01902 518981

 **Black Country Children's Services
Improvement Partnership**