

English
& Media
Centre

SUPPORTING BOY WRITERS

AN INITIAL DISSEMINATION REPORT FROM AN EMC PROJECT WITH MAYFIELD, SEVEN KINGS AND WANSTEAD SCHOOLS

FUNDED BY THE TEACHER DEVELOPMENT AGENCY

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

edited by Barbara Bleiman

English and Media Centre, 18 Compton Terrace,
London, N1 2UN © 2009

CONTENTS

Foreword	iii
Introduction	3
Jill Anderson	5
Matt McHugh	11
Albany Davies	19
Fatima Conteh	34
Aisha Begum	47
Jane Waters	53
Reflections on the project	62
Boys and writing – an overview	64
Bibliography	68

FOREWORD

Anne Turvey and John Yandell from the Institute of Education

The research undertaken in this project is underpinned by a number of key principles:

- a commitment to improving one's own teaching through practice-based enquiry
- understanding how an improvement in practice should be based on an understanding of children's learning
- a willingness to consider alternatives to current practice
- the importance of a framework for researching practice, guiding reflection and analysing findings.

The kind of 'learning community' that this group of teachers constitutes, offers an ideal context for developing new understandings about writing and the supporting of writing. The questions that the teachers ask about individual children have emerged from their work in classrooms and from the teachers' desire to meet the needs of specific individuals with difficulties. From the close reading of particular children and from the sharing of their findings, the teachers are feeling their way towards general statements about writing and development but without losing the complexity of such questions as: is planning helpful for inexperienced writers; is there a place for collaborative writing in our classrooms; what is a good writing frame?

Writing a case study seems to provide the teachers with a perspective that is both inside and outside the discourses of schooling. They consistently consider particular writers in the light of some sharp questions about such discourses as 'targets', 'levels' and 'ability'; but there are also astute questions about approaches to writing

that have come to be seen as 'supportive' for all students: writing frames; planning and drafting; collaborative writing; talk and writing.

The teachers acknowledge the irreducible complexity of what they are investigating. Their accounts show clearly why 'attempting to address "struggling boy writers"' must always attend to the individual pupil: 'what works for one student may not work for another' (p.28). In considering the details of the social contexts in which writing 'tasks' are set and supported, the teachers provide a rich picture of classrooms and through discussion with each other they are able to establish what these contexts have in common without losing the particulars – of the classrooms as well as of teachers and pupils. They are able to comment on the challenges of 'balancing the needs of individuals against the needs of the class' (p.28). It's possible that some teachers feel this focus on the individual is a limitation of a case study approach but we think there is evidence in their accounts of a developing confidence in the value of this focus for the way it enables the teachers to represent their professional knowledge to themselves and to each other. When they meet they are able to 'share and sharpen their findings' (John Hickman, p.63) and this process allows for both common ground and differences to be discussed in potentially fruitful ways. There is little sense of what teachers have become used to over the past few years: a 'diagnosis=>intervention=>=>cure' trajectory.

Two of the teachers in the report mention specifically the kinds of reflection and enquiry that were part of their PGCE courses and how the 'pressures and excesses of everyday teaching' have reduced the opportunities for this. Where are the networks to make this possible for NQTs and experienced teachers? It seems to us important to support this kind of professional development within English studies at this time. We think that this project could be seen as a model for the ways in which practising teachers in a very real sense 'lead the research' while at the same time work

with professional bodies, subject associations and advisers. The project is a strong argument for forms of CPD that are collaborative, that emerge from teachers' practice and are supported and sustained over time.

Anne Turvey and John Yandell

THE PROJECT

INTRODUCTION

In January 2008 the English and Media Centre was funded by Teacher Development Agency (TDA) to set up a short CPD project for teachers on 'Struggling Boy Writers', with the aim of 'establishing a small network of teachers to research what constitutes effective and manageable personalised learning with specific reference to low achieving boys in years 7 and 8'.

The project was born out of EMC's sense that this group of pupils presented particular challenges for teachers in an educational climate that seemed to support a personalised learning agenda but whose dominant mode of communication was in terms of whole class routines and procedures. The skills of sensitive fine-tuning of the teaching of writing, to meet the needs of individuals with difficulties, seemed to have been eroded. We wanted to work with a group of teachers who would be interested in taking a case study approach that would allow them to explore ways of developing their own practice and thinking about the teaching of writing in the light of these tensions. A pair of teachers from three Redbridge schools agreed to participate.

For the project each teacher selected two case study students from either a Year 7 or Year 8 class. Initially the teachers interviewed their students and collected samples of their writing, to identify the key issues about their underachievement in writing. They then met for a day conference at the English and Media Centre to talk, introduce their case studies, share experiences and find out about recent research on struggling writers (see 'Boys and writing' on page 62 for a brief list of some key findings from

a literature search conducted by EMC staff). They experienced a range of different strategies for getting students started on writing (a set of ideas for writing poetry, ranging from highly scaffolded approaches such as writing frames through to a variety of other approaches including visual strategies and role-play as well as free writing.) They came up with an action plan of one or two strategies that they felt might make a difference to their case studies.

Over the course of the term, the teachers, supported by John Hickman (a Redbridge LEA consultant) and EMC staff, tried out the approaches that they had chosen and recorded their thoughts about the impact, not only on the case study boys but also on their classes as a whole and on their own thinking about how to help struggling writers. They maintained contact with EMC and each other via 'basecamp', a web-based tool that allows projects to be managed and tracked. Lessons were observed or videoed, with a focus on the case studies, providing the teachers with close-up evidence of what the students were doing in response to their strategies.

In early June, at an interim meeting in Redbridge, the teachers brought evidence of what they had been doing to share with the whole group. This included short video clips that the whole group could discuss, to draw out interesting observations. Sharing their experiences not only allowed the teachers to support each other and offer advice but also provided inspiration for them to try out each other's approaches as well.

In July, at the end of the academic year, the group met for a final conference at EMC. John Hickman presented his reflections and observations about the impact of the Project on the participants and the outcomes in terms of CPD. The teachers discussed the gains for their case studies and their classes, the stumbling blocks and problems and what they felt they had learned about both struggling writers and the project as a process of CPD.

Some key aspects that they focused on were:

- Handwriting – a neglected area?
- Collaborative writing – how helpful is it? How can students be taught how to get the most out of it?
- Talking to your students – the importance of dialogue and paying attention to the struggling writer; what can be learned by asking students about their writing?
- Opportunities for sustained writing – how to structure lessons to give more time for writing and create a ‘writing workshop’ atmosphere.
- Scaffolding writing – the strengths and weaknesses of writing frames and what might replace them
- Marking student work and targets – what makes a difference? How can marking be made to count more?
- Visual approaches to writing – how helpful are they for struggling writers?
- Finding out more about students’ work in other subjects – what light can this throw on them as writers in English lessons?
- Being realistic about the blocks to success – how to cope with limited development
- What about the rest of the class? How do the approaches adopted for struggling writers fit the needs of other students? What impact does paying attention to a few students have on the class as a whole?
- Classroom investigation as a form of CPD – how does reflecting about your practice, in relation to two case studies, make you a different kind of teacher? Can this kind of reflection help you become more flexible, attuned to students individual needs and responsive to research?
- Greater understanding of what it actually is that Ofsted and the strategy regard as good practice.

During the Summer holidays, the teachers began to write up their projects as the reports which form the basis of this booklet. They held dissemination meetings in their Departments, in which they presented their work and selected the most significant new approaches to offer to their colleagues. They raised important new ideas for the department to consider and also talked about how the project had impacted on them as reflective practitioners.

The reports in this publication provide fascinating accounts of six teachers’ work with twelve boys and their ways of going about work with struggling writers. We hope that their approaches as well as the processes of trialling and reflecting that they describe might be useful to other teachers who want to make a difference to this important group of students.

The teachers whose work is presented in this publication are:

- Jill Anderson, Mayfield School
- Matt McHugh, Mayfield School
- Fatima Conteh, formerly Wanstead School, now Quintin Kynaston
- Albany Davies, formerly Wanstead School, now Seven Kings High School
- Aisha Begum, Seven Kings High School
- Jane Waters, Seven Kings High School

We are grateful to the Senior Management Teams of the three schools for their support and to John Hickman for his invaluable contribution to the project.

JILL ANDERSON

Mayfield School and College

OVERVIEW

This was a project about struggling boy writers. I was asked to identify two boys in a Year 7 class who were underachieving in their writing. After choosing the students, they were interviewed and we attended a workshop on issues surrounding boys' writing. At the workshop we also explored a range of strategies that could be used for teaching writing. On the same day we were asked to identify strategies to use with our students. Towards the end of the project, the students were interviewed again.

MY CASE STUDIES

A and B are both quiet students in a class of able, outspoken boys. The boys are both well behaved and undemanding of attention in a class of very dominating assertive boys. A is a Black English student of Caribbean origin and English is his first language. His KS2 English SATs score at the beginning of the project was 3.5, although his writing score was lower than his reading. B's ethnic background is Indian and his first language is Panjabi. His KS2 SAT score was 4.3, however his writing again is lower. Evidence of writing in both of the boys' English books showed consistent level 3 work. Both boys conveyed a desire to be successful, and B in particular had set high standards for himself and interaction with his parents suggested that they also had high expectations for him. At the start of the project I knew very little about the boys and felt they were the type of students that were at risk of being unnoticed in the class, therefore I thought they would be good candidates for the project.

Initial interviews and assessment

At the start of the project we were encouraged to interview our students individually. The interviews were filmed and transcripts made. The initial interviews with the boys suggested that they had positive attitudes towards writing and English. B and A both expressed a preference for writing stories and poems, and both students said that they spend time writing at home, although when I asked them to bring in samples of work, neither of the students were able to provide me with this. Both students said that when their book is marked and targets are set, they feel it helps them improve their writing.

A and B expressed negatives attitudes about their spelling and were aware that spelling is an area where they need to improve their writing. Although spelling and punctuation were both areas where the boys struggle in their writing, I felt that it was something they were aware of and perhaps too much focus on spelling would limit their progress and awareness of problems in other areas of their writing.

The boys' writing initially seemed to share similar weaknesses. When looking at A and B's writing I diagnosed sustaining writing, shaping and structuring ideas and expanding ideas as problems. As a result, I identified shaping and structuring writing as a key area I would focus on in order to improve the boys writing, but as the project began to unfold, providing opportunities for sustained writing became more important. Opportunities for writing had not always allowed enough time for them to produce a substantial piece of work, and both students seemed to need a substantial amount of time in order to produce a sustained piece.

The extracts from A and B's exercise books (see page 6) highlight the issues of structuring and sustaining writing as well as issues with spelling and punctuation, which were mentioned in the student interview.

one sunny day there was a family the lived on albert rode so the day started usually but thir was one quit boy when ever he go's to school he get's piked on his name was Jacob people would pick on him and all Jacob would say in his mind I wish I had a comic book that characters would come to life

A, Story draft, 17th November, 2007

I am scared and fritened of my new home there are lots of people here and I hope to see you soon. How are you doing

B, Empathetic letter home from a character in a film, 28th March, 2008

STRATEGIES

Over the course of the project I decided to incorporate several new strategies. First I used visual approaches in order to help provide students with a range of ideas to enable them to sustain their writing. Another strategy was to provide opportunities for paired work. I was hoping this would create conditions where students would be forced to reflect on their writing through the discussions that would occur. I also felt I wanted to find out more about their writing in other subjects as a way of gaining a broader picture of them and their writing.

COLLABORATIVE WRITING

I decided to use collaborative writing because of some of the discussion and activities that took place at the initial workshop at the EMC. A range of approaches to writing were tried, from being left very much on your own, through to drama or visual approaches and collaborative writing. In the course of discussion about this I began to think that collaborative writing might be beneficial to A and B. Although paired work is frequently used in my lessons to share ideas, I rarely used it when students were writing a sustained piece of work.

Both boys seemed to struggle with seeing drafting as a question of making choices. They wrote without evaluating their writing as they went along, often putting down the first idea that struck them. I felt by doing a piece of writing collaboratively they would spend more time thinking about their choices in writing as they would have to share and evaluate them.

Initially, I paired A and B because they had quite a nice working relationship and I thought because they were similar in ability it would avoid the possibility of one member of the group dominating the discussion about writing. Without intervening I made a point of observing the two boys working and I found that the more confident student, B, was dominating. Students were asked to write the opening paragraph together and when I looked at the remainder of the piece of writing it was the strongest section of writing in the piece. B had a clearer sense of the purpose of the writing and that is evident in the paragraph they wrote together in comparison with the rest of A's writing.

Together the boys wrote the following:

The rabbit proof fence is a moving film about three brave girls who get taken away from their mother by mr. riggs, mr neville's assitant. But then the three girls try to ascape travilling over 1500 miles the girls face hard times together.

Following this paragraph the boys finished the piece on their own. B's subsequent writing on his own lacks detail and the vocabulary is less powerful.

.This film is rated at 5 star..

Again, A's writing in comparison does not sustain the purpose of the writing (to review) and he essentially retells the story.

then molly and grasy went Back But then mr Neville came and took daisey away and they never saw her again

Overall, the extract that was written collaboratively by the boys reflects a strong sense of purpose and contains more emotional and persuasive vocabulary. There is also a more powerful and engaging voice in the collaborative piece.

From setting up this exercise of collaborative writing, the benefits are evident in the writing. There is an immediate improvement in the quality of what the boys could achieve together, as compared with what they could do on their own.

The next time I provided an opportunity for students to work collaboratively, I placed A with a student who was a much stronger writer. This did not turn out to be an ideal partnership as the more able student was eager to just start writing and get on with his work whilst A lacked confidence in expressing and sharing ideas.

Towards the end of the project, when I interviewed the students, B said that he did not enjoy writing in partners because he felt like he did not always get a chance to share his ideas and when he works on his own he thinks about his ideas and writing more. In contrast, A said he enjoyed the opportunity to work with partners and share his ideas. When asked what kind of partner he enjoys working with the best, he said, 'a partner that helps me a lot'.

Reflecting on collaborative writing

This work highlighted a few worthwhile points. The first thing I noticed from this collaborative work is that students need to be provided with models, reminders and coaching on how to work collaboratively. Prior to working on this project I overestimated the students' ability to work in partners and assumed that the students had acquired the skills in primary school. In addition, as B's comments reflect, students with writing difficulty might not respond in the same way to the same strategy. However, the sample of collaborative writing that A and B did illustrates the positive impact it had on their writing and although it is not sustained in their individual bits of writing, perhaps over a period of time they might individually absorb the lessons learnt in discussing

writing. In a short project like this and with so many different strategies being used it's difficult to judge the impact of just one.

SUSTAINED WRITING USING VISUAL APPROACHES

Towards the end of the project I decided to ensure that I devote more time for sustained writing, using a storyboard to scaffold a longer piece of work. The students were placed in mixed ability groups and given a stimulus picture to build a story around. Each group had to complete a storyboard that told the story around their picture. The storyboard would form the basis of their planning. Subsequent lessons were used for writing the story. Following each writing lesson my planning was informed by the students' work.

Because of the work they did on their storyboards, A and B had a clear idea of where they were going with their writing and I found they were able to write for a sustained period of time. After analysing the boys work it was apparent that both of them were using mainly simple sentences, few connectives and very little variety in their sentences. This was an area that several students in the class needed to improve on, therefore I spent the next few lessons providing students with strategies for varying sentences in order to create a more shaped and structured piece of writing. The impact this had on the boy's writing was limited, but worthwhile even so as it demonstrates the importance of recognising writing as a skill that needs to be practised instead of something that can be taught and learned in couple of lessons.

INVESTIGATING THEIR WRITING IN OTHER SUBJECTS

I decided it might be interesting to get the bigger picture of what was happening with B and A's writing in other subjects. I found it very interesting that when I looked at a sample of B's writing (A's was unavailable) from his Science lessons, his writing style seemed different. It seemed more

confident as it included detail and the sentences were complex and used a variety of connectives. Overall, it was well structured and more fluid. These samples of writing were shorter and were describing a process. The samples also included diagrams. In the final interview however, B said that he prefers writing stories.

The following extract from B's Science book demonstrates an assured control over style and structure. In addition he uses complex sentences, connectives and punctuation more confidently. Interestingly the extract was written on the same day as the extract from the empathetic letter included above. The extract also included diagrams of the processes being described.

Analysing B's writing from a different subject was a useful strategy that enabled me to gain a wider picture of B as a writer and raised some interesting questions.

These contrasts in writing would be an interesting area to investigate further and it highlights the importance of students being able to transfer skills from one subject to the next. It would be interesting to follow this up further, to see whether his greater sense of control is to do with following a very strong set of generic conventions that he repeats often in a lesson, whether it is because the content is very prescribed, whether it is because a science write-up is shorter than a story or whether it is because B is more enthused by the subject.

When you have indigestion pain is caused by your stomach acid rising up your gullet. This is caused by acid reacting with your body. To solve this pain you will have to take antacid because in this tablet it has alkali. When acid and alkali is together the chemical react and then when heated up it turns to crystal of salt and the water evaporates.

B, 28th March

How do antacid tablets work?

When you have indigestion, pain is caused by your stomach acid rising up your gullet. This is caused by the acid reacting with your body. To solve this pain you will have to have antacid because in this tablet it has alkali. When acid and alkali is together the chemical react and then when heated it turns to water and crystal of salt and the water evaporates.

acid + alkali → crystals of salt + water evaporates

Level 5.5
 It will explain and in your class included
 I show a pencil diagram of the acid & alkali particles
 very little writing

WATCHING THEM WRITING

Even though in the initial interview with A he recognised punctuation and spelling as an area he struggles with, it continued to be an issue in this particular piece of writing. During one of these lessons John Hickman made an interesting observation regarding the physical way that, 'A writes and the way he holds his pen'. He is left handed and because of the way in which he writes, his hand covers the page making it difficult for him to see what he has just written which probably relates to the issues he has with punctuation in his writing.

FINAL INTERVIEW

During the final interview with the boys I asked them whether they read over their work as they were writing or if they waited until they were finished to read the entire piece over. Interestingly A said that he prefers to add punctuation and check for his mistakes when he is finished a piece of writing. B also responded that he waited until he was finished. I think this, in addition to the way A holds his pen when he writes, is a contributing factor to his struggle to improve in writing. This highlights for me, the importance of teaching and discussing with students the process of reflecting and reading over as they write instead of just when they finish their work.

In the final interview I also spoke to the boys about how they felt about the targets they are given. Despite giving the boys a variety of targets, the boys still felt spelling was the main problem with their writing. Through the discussion I had with B, it was apparent that although they understood the targets, they were not always sure exactly what to do about them. Not surprisingly, both of the boys expressed that they value comments from their teachers and enjoy having their work read and commented on by peers.

THE IMPACT OF THE PROJECT

THE IMPACT ON THE BOYS

In the final interview, I asked the boys if they felt their writing had improved. A was positive and felt he was improving. B however did not feel that his writing had improved over the year. Although I could not see massive changes in their writing, as mentioned earlier I think A's confidence improved and both boys seemed to enjoy being a focus throughout the course of the project. The interviews also gave the students a chance to talk about and reflect on their writing which I feel has been a positive outcome for the boys and myself.

Time limitations

As I was planning the lessons I wanted to ensure that the build up to the writing was engaging and hooked the students, however I underestimated the amount of time the activities would take and as a result the students only had short slots of time available to undertake sustained writing. I did not see the students on a frequent basis, therefore at times, as much as two weeks would pass before I saw the students again and at that point the momentum of the activity would be lost before the students had an opportunity to write. Despite this, the feedback from these lessons was positive and the students were engaged and ready to write when they were given the opportunity. In the final interview, A referred back to the unit and said that he enjoyed it because he felt he had lots of ideas and material to refer to when he was stuck in his writing.

THE IMPACT ON ME

Professionally, the project had a great impact on me and encouraged critical reflection on the impact my teaching has on students' writing. Firstly, it has raised my consideration and awareness of students like B and A, who often

blend into the classroom because they work quietly and are undemanding of attention. In addition, my perception of both A's and B's confidence in the lessons was that they seemed to develop and to enjoy the extra attention they were receiving.

Furthermore, I have enjoyed the experience as I feel I have got to know the students better and it has reinforced the importance of the relationship between the teacher and student for progress to be made in developing writing skills. There are so many different skills that are needed for students to be successful writers therefore it seems important that there is an opportunity for the teacher to talk to the student about their writing and analyse it over a period of time. This project has also made me reflect critically on the amount of time actually spent in lessons writing. In the past I over-estimated the amount of time being provided for students to do sustained writing. The project has also made me aware that if collaborative work is to be successful and promote reflective discussions, it must be practised and modelled. Finally, it has also highlighted for me that students must be taught and reminded to reflect on and read over their writing as they produce it.

MATT MCHUGH

Mayfield School and College

CHOOSING THE CASE STUDIES

Initially I had some trouble selecting students who I thought would be appropriate for the project. Many of the boys in the group were achieving Level 4 or above and those that weren't were identified as being EAL or SEN students. Eventually I settled on C who, despite gaining a Level 4 in his primary SATs had produced Level 3 work in the early part of the year, and D, who was working at a very high Level 2.

Introducing the case studies

C has been something of a mystery, unfolding slowly as the project has progressed. At the beginning of the year I placed him under the category of unfocused and silly – he would often be talking quietly with the people around him and needed to be prompted to focus on his work. Early pieces of writing that he completed demonstrated some awareness of the effects of certain techniques on his audience, and yet any writing produced was very short in length. Motivation seemed to be a big stumbling block for C. Even at the beginning of the year he seemed to be 'switched off' identifying what he described as 'easy work' – like watching videos – as his favourite part of English.

In spite of this lack of focus, when he was spoken to about his writing, C did seem to have an understanding of some of the reasons why he was unmotivated. He complained about producing extended pieces of writing such as whole stories and play scripts, saying that they made his hand tired. He also expressed frustration at being dictated topics for writing. When asked how writing might be made more fun he suggested:

'Don't make us all do the same story... let us change the teacher's ideas.' This was one aspect of boys' motivation presented in an overview of research of boys' underachievement at EMC.

D was far more optimistic (or perhaps just less discerning) than C in his outlook to English. It became clear in his interview that he had a fondness for writing poetry, and he was unable to identify any parts of English that he didn't enjoy. Interestingly, he felt that his writing could be improved by using different coloured pens – black pens apparently produced a better standard of work than blue pens! Despite being a weaker student, D seemed to be quite vague (blissfully unaware?) in regards to any problems with his writing. He identified 'punctuation' and 'vocabulary' as possible areas of concern, although in later interviews it became apparent that he didn't really understand what these words meant. In general he felt 'alright about writing.'

By comparing the two boys' writing it became quite obvious that one issue both had was an inability to produce sustained and developed writing. D's work in particular was painfully brief – a short paragraph produced in a space of thirty minutes. Admittedly, the boys had done little writing in my lessons but even so, what they had produced in the time available was lacking in comparison with more able students.

Evidence of the boys' writing at the start of the project

Below are extracts from each of the boys' books – pieces of writing which they wrote as the start of a story based on the short film 'Between Us'. As mentioned above, the class were given thirty minutes to write, and it should be noted that D received one-on-one support from an LSA during much of this time. The class were also provided with a starter sentence to help them get writing which D has used.

It was so boring there was so much traffic. There was so much smoke coming out of the exhaust pipe. As I opened the window I could smell nasty petrol and cigarets, It was cold outside and I could hear loads of horns like people were swearin at each other. The rain made me feel stuffy.

C

the morning sun's light struggled to break through the thick huddle of grey clouds. Below on the motorway you could hear the roaring sound of the car engine. On the long motorway you can hear beeping. I can feel the rain dripping in my arms.

D

This led me to start questioning the factors influencing this lack of stamina. C had expressed a desire for freedom when writing:

- Had the tasks I had given them been too prescriptive?
- In the past, the longest block of writing the students had was thirty minutes. Was this enough time for students to be writing extended pieces?
- Was I stunting, rather than supporting, their creativity with objective driven pre-writing starters and modelling?

EXTENDED WRITING LESSONS

At some point during the project's first meeting day the idea of extended writing lessons was put forward. Given the boys' struggle with time and prescriptive tasks, I began thinking about lessons which would overcome these problems. The class was already accustomed to their fortnightly reading lessons and seemed to enjoy the regularity and independence that these brought. The class would go to the library, select a book in the first ten minutes, and then spend the rest of the lesson reading.

I toyed with the idea of somehow converting this into a writing lesson that featured the same independence and rested on similar rituals for the students to become familiar and comfortable with. I decided that I would designate one period a fortnight to such a lesson, and began developing rules to accompany these. These were:

- There would be no talking. Like a reading lesson, where quiet reading takes place, in a writing lesson, quiet writing would take place.
- Students would be allowed to borrow special pens that would be returned at the end of the lesson.
- Raffle tickets would be distributed to students who worked well. At the end of the lesson there would be a draw with chocolate as the prize.
- Questions from students would be limited to the start of the lesson. I wanted to encourage them to show some independence, and effort would be encouraged more than constantly checking if they were 'getting it right.'
- For the reason above, I wouldn't check what they were writing as they were working.
- Classical music was to be played as they wrote.
- Students could write whatever they wanted (story, report, blog, poem...

anything!) as long as it somehow related to the topic/s for that lesson (the first topics were 'War' and 'The First Day' based on the novel we're reading in class).

- I would collect students work at the end of the lesson and return it to them with written feedback at the start of the next writing lesson.

Extended writing lessons – what happened

The first lesson was an undoubted success in regards to its execution. Despite my feeling somewhat disorganised and under-prepared on the day, the class's behaviour was impeccable and every student seemed to respond well to the idea of writing.

D almost filled a complete A4 sheet of writing with a rather dramatic story about his first day of school. C produced a rap about the first day of school: 'We learn maths, we have no internet cafes.'

Everything seemed to be a success until I got to the point of marking. At this point, I realised for the lesson to be a success I would have to mark thirty-one pieces of writing each fortnight. This became quite an overwhelming prospect given the time I spent marking the first round. On C's piece alone I took at least fifteen minutes deliberating over my comments and ended up filling the remaining half of the A4 page he had written on.

Fortunately, before marking the second round of writing, I received some advice from John Hickman, our mentor in the project. He pointed out two things to me: firstly that in trying to develop the students' independence in regards to their writing, it was not necessary for me to direct the students with targets – rather, gently questioning comments could be used to help elicit the students' own thoughts on the strengths and weaknesses of their writing. Secondly, I could lessen my burden by restricting the space I used to write my comments. We discussed the idea of using a writing log, and

I produced a pro forma which I then used for the students' second round of writing (see appendix 1). This proved to be an asset to the lessons. Not only did it lessen my burden in terms of time, but it also meant that the students and myself had a chronological record of each others' musings on the writing taking place.

Perhaps a point of interest that's worth discussing here was how my provision of feedback took on a certain element of ceremony. When I decided to have the writing lesson, I was concerned about organisation or rather the lack of, and how this might effect the students' behaviour. Perhaps somewhat mistakenly, I still associate silence with good learning, and so I wanted students to have complete silence not only when writing, but also when they were reading my comments and reflecting. This meant that I would plan the lessons so that any talking would be out of the way at the beginning of the lesson. I knew that being Year 7s, the students would have difficulty not talking while their folders were being handed out, so I imposed the rule that the students were not able to open their folders and read the comments until all folders had been handed out and the class was settled and silent. Again, my main aim in doing this was ensuring that students wouldn't be distracted while they were reading the comments. However, when John came to observe the lesson he noticed another interesting effect this had. Making the students wait seemed to build up a sense of anticipation in the students, in regards to reading the feedback and in a sense, this seemed to emphasise the importance of the feedback even more. This point of the lesson had become almost exciting for the students, and was another reason for them to look forward to the lesson.

At this point, the implementation of the lesson seemed to be a success. The kids were enjoying the lessons; organisation-wise it was easy to get underway; and the time involved in marking had been taken care of. It was time to shift the focus back onto the boys who had given rise to the lesson format in the first place.

CASE STUDY 1 – C

C had made some progress in the sense that he seemed to enjoy the lessons. However the freedom of the lessons meant that he only ever wrote poetry or raps. This was frustrating in the sense that it meant it was hard to get an idea of what he was capable of as a writer. My reflection on his first piece of work had focused on his use of punctuation, and after this it was clear he understood the errors he was making. Beyond this though, many of my comments on his writing focused on trying to coax him into producing something other than poetry. Interestingly, in one of his interviews C had said that he liked writing poetry because it usually meant that he didn't have to write as much as when he was writing a story for example. In his mind, poetry involved careful consideration (particularly when thinking about rhymes) but didn't require length.

To me, C's insistence on writing poetry seemed something of a disappointment, as I felt this stopped him from developing as a writer. However, upon reflection I realise that the writing lesson and my tracking of him did have a positive impact. For the first time all year, C appeared to be genuinely engaged with his work. He enjoyed the writing lessons and he was proud of his work. Whenever I passed him in the halls he would always ask me if I had read his work yet, and wanted some kind of feedback. And even though I found it difficult to help him pinpoint a certain part of his writing, I was always able to praise aspects of his work, and this seemed to have a positive effect on his attitude towards English. I feel perhaps that if the lessons had been instituted earlier in the year, it may have given me the time to explore C as a writer in more detail, perhaps moving into genres other than poetry.

C's final piece of work allowed me to question his understanding of audience and purpose. He produced the following poem in response to the lesson's theme, revenge.

*All of you people are wasting your time,
running around and starting crime,
If you hate someone don't mean you have to
shoot your Hater,
you know your Brain is much more greater,
stop the guns if you want to breath with your
lungs,
Your more likely to get stabbed if your carrying
a knife,
It will take away your life, That means no job,
no money,
no wife, unless you run away your more likely
to survive,
your meant to be home an hour ago But you
never arrive,
your mum gets worried she calls the cops,
every body's
shouts his heart beat stops, he is dead, they
reveal his body
bleeding in a hospital bed. He had his death his
head got slayed
off like Macbeath*

CASE STUDY 2 – D

D, like C, also made progress in the sense that the writing lessons seemed to make English something to look forward to. Prior to these lessons it seemed as though D had struggled with sustained writing, and the most he had written in one lesson was little more than four lines. Clearly, having the freedom of choice when writing made the process far more appealing to D and this was expressed in interviews. It also evident in the increase in length of his writing.

D's last piece of work entitled 'Revenge At Teachers!!!!' was a narrative he wrote in response to, again, the theme of revenge. As the following extract shows, while the work wasn't of the highest quality, in just two lessons D was able to write three and a half A4 pages, and the work provided me with opportunities to engage him in written dialogue about aspects of his writing like narrative structure and paragraphs. Previously his writing had been so brief that there was little scope for dialogue about it, or intervention from me.

Once there was a group of boys called the Revengers. And they do lots of stuff they revenge on people. And may be teachers asswell. They were the only boys that can reveng. People they picture of them stick it up on the wall. On the middle of the night the group join together to look on teachers. They get inside school. They be spies and look for the teacher and see what they do or rob something. They have all there spies equipment. So they are all around to start 3 2 1 go go go. The revengers get in with a big action. Every thing when bang and broken.

The importance of feedback

Like C, D also seemed to be motivated by the guarantee of regular feedback. On his second piece of writing, he wrote without being prompted 'Teacher's Comment' at the bottom of his work, encouraging me to write something.

However, in spite of his enthusiasm for receiving this feedback, D didn't seem to benefit from it the same way C did, or at least showed the potential to. D struggled with responding to prompts and I feel as though written comments weren't enough to help him reflect on his writing. For example, when responding to the comment 'What will make an interesting ending for the reader?', D wrote, 'I will have a good ending to my story.' And to 'Why do we need paragraphs when we write?' he responded, 'ill make about two paragraphs.' After the third lesson D (and C) responded very positively in an interview to the idea of coming after school and briefly discussing his writing in a one-on-one appointment. Although I did have one-on-one talks with some of the students in later lessons, these were somewhat constrained by the fact that they were taking place as other students were writing. Unfortunately, while the boys expressed interest in them, I didn't organise the after-school appointments – perhaps it's only now on reflection that I realise how beneficial they may have been particularly for students like D who need careful oral explanation as opposed to quick written comments to really understand how they can progress in their learning. This is something I'm determined to try next year with my new classes.

It is important to point out that while perhaps D wasn't making the progress he may have been capable of, this didn't effect his enthusiasm towards the lessons. At the end of each lesson, D always reflected positively:

'I enjoyed the writting this lesson's and ill remember to do full stops and other punctuation.'

'I liked this lesson becaus there were nice music and I can cosatrate with m work.'

'I liked it and i was joing very well what i need to write i can image it.'

THE IMPACT ON THE CLASS AS A WHOLE

Importantly, the benefits from these lessons were not only obvious in C and D, but they also had a positive impact on the rest of the class. The class was unanimous in their positivity towards the lesson – the one time it had to be cancelled was met with a collective groan. And, like D and C, students who normally wouldn't write very much produced large amounts of writing, regardless of their ability. In fact, ability seemed to be non-issue for the students. Perhaps the freedom of the task meant that there was no apprehension about being able to complete it or not, but what was certain was that the students were writing for enjoyment, not to please the teacher. At one point I realised not one of the students had enquired as to what level they were working at, and levels never became a point of interest. What particularly pleased me was the progress of the gifted and talented students in these lessons. I often feel this is a group I have trouble really challenging, but writing lessons allowed me to target students in a very individual way, and the G&T students seemed to benefit from the comments and reflection more than any of the other students in the class.

The development of written dialogues was a particular benefit in allowing me to give highly personalised comments to students. Prior to using the writing log, any feedback I had given students came in the form of either praise or targeting, but these were clearly not as effective as the questioning used in writing lessons. Unlike targets, which seemed to offer only directions to students, questioning required more reflection on the student's part for areas to improve. It was this reflection that put the topic at the front of the students' minds while they continued to write. Perhaps it also helped that these questions were dealt with immediately prior to the next instalment

of their writing. To one student, Shafi, who was forgetting to use full-stops, I asked:

'Do you think you are using full-stops everywhere you should be?'

Shafi touched on this in his response:

'I think that your right and I should add more full-stops.'

It was clear through his improved use of full-stops that this was something he thought about while he continued to write.

Aside from acting as a friendly replacement for targets, questioning also helped me to ascertain students' understanding of particular aspects of their writing. Another student, Janet, was making unnecessary use of apostrophes. When I asked her why she was using them, she wrote back: 'Oh yeh I use a (') because it's easier to read because it looks like one word!' Whereas a target wouldn't have given Janet the chance to react directly, her response to my question made it clear that she didn't have sound understanding of apostrophes, and this allowed me to tackle the issue with continued dialogue.

Questioning also allowed me to learn about the students in regards to areas outside of their academic progress. Milan, a student who was new to the class responded to my questions about full stops and capital letters with the following comment: 'I should add more capital in story normally because in my language there is no full stop or capital letters.'

Students' use of questioning also proved beneficial for me in helping them to progress. One of my first comments on Justine's story (one of my G&T students) focused on the idea of verb tense. She wrote back to me:

'Thankyou for the comment Mr McHugh. What does verb tense mean?'

In my response, I tried to include some examples of past and present tense, and was met with the reply:

'Oh, thankyou Sir, I understand what tense means now. And I like giving descriptions!'

It was these frequent upbeat responses that made marking the kids' folders such a pleasure. Another G&T student, Dirie, made the following comments as part of our dialogue:

'I went fine with new great ideas this time. Cant wait till next writing lesson. I love it!'

(Responding to my comparison of his writing to the style of an episodic TV series):

'I think it is a good thing. Also I made up a theme tune for it! IT RYHMES!!!'
'It went fine and Thomas got a robot arm. AWESOME!!!'

The fact that the dialogue I was sharing with the students was one-on-one meant I could really engage with them and their ideas, and it was this personal nature of the feedback which also allowed me to differentiate in such a focused way. For many students, I touched on simple ideas such as punctuation to help them improve the technical accuracy of their writing. However, with the G&T students, I was able to focus on more complex ideas, like narrative structure, and purpose and audience.

CONCLUSION

For me as a teacher, the most satisfying part of being in the project, apart from feeling a closer connection with the students, was the opportunity to treat aspects of my teaching as a craft – something that could be explored, honed and reflected on. Too often I feel much of the effort I put into my work as a teacher is focused on the results. In some ways, perhaps quite cynically, teaching can feel like working in a factory. As much as many teachers would like to individualise the learning of each student, time constraints, exams, large class sizes and sometimes rigid curriculum objectives means that teaching turns into something resembling a production line. We focus on deadlines and numbers rather than the process and quality. Focusing on the two boys felt like slowing down this process: thinking about the materials, diverging from the formula and making something of quality to be appreciated rather than something which serves a purpose for data. For me, this is what teaching should be about – completing the job with passion so that both myself and the students can enjoy not just the results, but the process as well.

The next step for me in developing these lessons really comes down to my own experimentation with them. Next year I plan to have a writing lesson with all of my classes, both KS3 and KS4. I'm particularly interested in how this Year 7 group's enthusiasm towards writing might translate for KS4 classes and, in turn, how this might help to prepare these classes for the writing components of the exam. I would also like to experiment with the format of the lessons. Can pair and group work be integrated into the lessons? How can I improve the quality of feedback through discussion with students, and what from should this take? These are some questions which I would like to address in the coming academic year.

Teacher's Comments:
What do you think about these comments? Do you have any questions about them?
How did you go with your writing this lesson?
Teacher's Comments:
What do you think about these comments? Do you have any questions about them?
How did you go with your writing this lesson?
Teacher's Comments:
What do you think about these comments? Do you have any questions about them?
How did you go with your writing this lesson?
Review



<h1>Writing Lesson Log</h1> <p>Name: _____</p>
Teacher's Comments:
What do you think about these comments? Do you have any questions about them?
How did you go with your writing this lesson?
Teacher's Comments:
What do you think about these comments? Do you have any questions about them?
How did you go with your writing this lesson?
Teacher's Comments:
What do you think about these comments? Do you have any questions about them?
How did you go with your writing this lesson?



ALBANY DAVIES

Wanstead School

OVERVIEW

This project was about struggling boy writers, working at Level 3 or below and failing to achieve their potential. The idea was to identify two students in a Year 7 or Year 8 class and explore ways of supporting and motivating them. A by-product of this would be to explore how focusing on two students might impact on our thinking about whole classes, to find ways of integrating any strategies developed into future teaching. The project was investigative and we were encouraged to think about what research had revealed about what makes a difference to struggling boy writers and identify one or two approaches that might have an impact on our boys.

CASE STUDY 1 – E

Reasons for selection

When I started the project E was working at Level 3 in terms of his writing and his motivation around writing was poor. E is a vocal character in class who is keen to orally share his opinions and imaginative ideas. There was a clear gap between his spoken ability and his writing. I wanted to focus on E for the project, as he was clearly enthusiastic and able when expressing ideas orally therefore it seemed sad that he was unable to sustain that within written tasks.

His writing within lessons and at home was often inappropriate in terms of its purpose or genre, often a bit 'whacky' and lacking any attempts to use suitable vocabulary or structure. For example, he would create obscure scenarios for fictional

characters within a text we had studied such as John Boyne's *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*. He would be unable to realise why his diary entry for the character of the imprisoned Jewish doctor was inappropriate when he had written it in a strong London dialect without any punctuation. At the start of the project I conducted an interview with him about his reading and writing. During this interview, he described this novel as 'Not my type of thing' but he does read a lot of non-fiction such as 'Horrible Science'. I thought it might be interesting to see how this thirst for non-fiction could be utilised within the classroom and particularly in the context of writing.

He also regularly failed to complete sustained pieces of writing due to a lack of concentration and motivation or completed it with minimum amount of effort so that it was 'out of the way'. He clearly had a lack of motivation to write due to his poor self-image and his views of his inadequacies. Although he often expressed this in a jovial manner ('Ha, ha I know my spelling is bad Miss!'), I saw this as a method of protecting himself from failure. This attitude was somewhat explained at a Parents' Evening where his mother expressed her frustrations at her own writing abilities and claimed that this is a trait that she fears that she has passed on to her son. Several weeks later, she sent her son to school with a letter that she wanted me to proof-read and modify for her!

E also expressed some annoyance and exasperation with his handwriting and admitted that numerous lessons and extra support at Primary School had not helped him. Research presented to us by the EMC highlighted the huge impact that handwriting can have on a struggling boy writer. I felt that his attitude towards handwriting was a factor in his reluctance to write; however, I wanted to focus more specifically on his self-perception and organisation. He is very willing to type work up so I felt that I could, for now, allow the handwriting issue to be held over, to focus on other possible ways of making a difference to his writing.

What I wanted him to achieve

1. For E to have enough motivation to complete tasks and complete them to a high standard and for him to develop pride in his work.

E would regularly lose work and 'forget' to complete written homework. When I spoke to him about his writing in the initial videoed interview, he clearly felt that it was not very good. The interview revealed that his main concern was 'getting it wrong' especially when using paragraphs, commas or when writing essays. I hoped to help him understand that writing is not always about using accurate punctuation but also about expressing ideas and developing skills. Encouraging independence and decreasing dependence on teacher input seemed to me to be essential. This would ideally manifest itself in an increased amount of class work and final assessed pieces of writing.

2. For E to organise his writing clearly and appropriately.

E is a lively and imaginative child but this energy often hindered any kind of structure when writing stories and exploring ideas within essays. His ideas became muddled and merged into one another without explanation or development. I wanted E to begin to slow himself down when writing and try to consider the order that ideas should go in. This would be in direct contrast to his own method which is to rush work to try and complete it or to simply ignore it.

I hoped that working more slowly and thinking more deeply would also enable him to think coherently and truly recognise the good ideas that he has, thus contributing to an improvement in his self-image and motivation.

Previous employment of traditional writing frames had not had a positive effect on him as he would follow them wholesale without developing his own thoughts. During the interviews, he did express a dislike for essays but said that he liked opinion and factual writing because in his own words,

'It's your answer. It isn't right and it isn't wrong.' This statement suggested that he would like more freedom to express ideas (another theme identified in research on what makes a difference to boys). I have attached an example of a frame that I had used with him in the past (see appendix 1) and on reflection, it is clear why he follows it unquestioningly and does not challenge it. The frame is so prescriptive that it is easy for a young and unconfident student to assume that it is the *only* way to write the essay. I needed to find an alternative method of developing his skills. This idea grew further from research presented by the group and the EMC which suggested that scaffolding has become overly intrusive and that it may be a hindrance rather than a help especially when encouraging students to formulate new and independent ideas. I posed myself the question, would removing the frame help E?

When discussing this idea with other teachers, it became clear that many agree with me: writing frames often serve as 'evidence' to other teaching professionals that you are supporting a child rather than it being a functional and helpful aid to students themselves. I wanted to move away from this concept and decided to make this a focus for my work with E in this project, to explore what difference it might make to him.

Early evidence

- The following question from the student interview clearly highlights his problems with independent work:
 Q: 'What have teachers done to help you with ideas?'
 F: Asking a teacher gives you more ideas. Having a sheet which says 'Paragraph One' and 'Paragraph Two' also helps especially when beginning my sentences.
- Throughout the year, the students complete a number of assessed pieces of work, each consolidating a unit of study. E had failed to submit any of these pieces of work due to lost books, forgetfulness or simple indifference. This clearly indicates

his low levels of motivation for written assessments.

- His class book was messy and lacking in organisation (see example in appendix 2). Writing was often left incomplete or he had prioritised the copying of Learning Objectives over that of the work itself. This made me realise that students in E's situation can prioritise copying from the board, using it as a way of staying 'safe' within the classroom. I began to question the practice of asking students to write down the day's objective. Realising this certainly made me feel like I had been prioritising the wrong thing within the classroom by beginning each lesson with a pointless 'copying' activity that caused more harm than good. I felt that this linked to my idea about the regular use of writing frames as 'proof' of teacher support; was I using L.O.s as proof that lessons were planned? Were they a safety net in case parents checked students' books so that they would see the students had been provided with clear aims for each lesson – whether or not the student had actually tackled the work.

My planned interventions

In the light of my reflections on E, the student interview and my evaluation of the evidence of his work, I decided to focus on three strategies to improve his writing.

1. Using oral work (whole class, group and paired) to develop appropriate ideas and to prioritise information.
2. The use of rewards with specific emphasis on oral praise and postcards home.
3. Implementing strategies to structure ideas with a desire to move away from restrictive writing frames.

Of the three, my strongest focus came to be on the question of writing frames.

INTERVENTION 1

March 2008 – The first attempt...

The class was asked to do an imaginative account of a character from the book *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*. Everyone was provided with a potential format/frame for this page but it was made clear that this was optional. The first draft was completed in class following a class discussion and mind map. The class was asked to write up their work as a final draft and submit during the following week.

Formulating ideas using oral work was successful for E who was able to make several notes on his plan most of which were appropriate. Although I was disappointed that E chose to use exactly the same format that I offered as an example, he did hit all the success criteria. Why did he choose to follow my exact format despite clear encouragement to experiment? It seems that E found the thought of more freedom very challenging and the sudden shift to independence was too much for him. In future work, I decided to see whether there might be some happy medium between the two forms of planning: perhaps group work that plans a frame would help E, especially as he is happy to work and receive help from the more able students in the class.

In terms of my reward/praise strategy, I made sure that I praised the content of his work so that the next step did not undermine his work so far. When the first draft was complete, I modelled the process of proof-reading using his work. E was then encouraged to complete the rest of the proof-reading for his writing by pretending to be the teacher with the red pen! This type of fun approach/ role play worked very well for E and he identified all the errors which he promptly altered. He even began marking other people's books! The method clearly energised E as the 'cloak' of the teacher gave him the added confidence to make judgments that he would otherwise have ignored or thought may be incorrect. He enjoyed the feeling of control that I believe he gets from

factual/ opinion work that he claims can't be right or wrong or where 'The answer is clear'.

Unfortunately, E failed to complete his final draft despite all the hard work he put into the plan. When asked why, he avoided the question and dismissed it as forgetfulness. I was very disappointed that despite my regular encouragement he had not recognised the progress that he had made in the first draft stage. He did not appear to be able to make the connection between the two stages of writing an essay. Only when I warned that I would need to involve his mother, did E acquiesce and the work was submitted. In addition, he had evidently forgotten the sense of pleasure he had got from our marking activity as he had word-processed the writing. This had a detrimental affect on accuracy.

When I did see the essay, he was very proud of the fact that he had handed it in but this seemed to be more about his claim that he had 'stayed up 'til 10 o'clock finishing that for you Miss'. The final part of that sentence highlighted the need to work on his second target: taking pride in his work. He had completed it not for himself as a celebration of his work, but simply to avoid trouble. While this may be interpreted as E caring enough about my opinion to make this final push, I must admit that I felt very disheartened by this end result. Initially, I felt that I had given a lot of extra attention to E (to the detriment of others?) but he seemed to have interpreted it as extra pressure from me – not a supportive and positive opportunity. However, I later began to consider the idea that perhaps E was pleased to be avoiding trouble and winning my approval may be a reasonable first step towards finding his own motivation. On the flip side, the former-school 'nerd' within me finds it troubling that the less motivated and indifferent students get the extra support and praise that the able and willing can sometimes lose because they are quiet and get on with what is expected. I felt that I needed to find a way to encourage the struggling boy writers to get a sense of satisfaction from completing work that doesn't revolve around the teacher's praise.

Summary

- Use of oral work to select appropriate information for writing was successful.
- Successful proof-reading skills were developed. There was a need to continue encouraging it to ensure improved accuracy.
- Word processing had not helped with the accuracy of his spelling etc. He obviously did not connect the proof-reading we did in class with the final write-up using a computer.
- Support in class was working but more independence and appreciation for work was needed. It is difficult to get the balance correct. How can I use more able students to support others in the class? Clear and structured praise enabled him to feel successful.
- Poor organisational/ homework skills may need to be addressed before we will see any independent improvement.

INTERVENTION 2

April 2008 – Second assessment

The assessment was a summative argumentative essay about the suitability of *The Boy is the Striped Pyjamas* for children under 12 years old. The students began preparation by thinking of ideas for homework – for and against reasons why the book is/is not suitable for under 12s. In class, we had a structured feedback session where we organised ideas into Yes and No columns onto the IWB. Each student then had to decide on their opinion and write a sentence that they could refer back to that reminded them of their argument. Using the feedback on the IWB, each student had to select five key points that they wanted to include in their essay, based on their opinion and argument. These ideas were transferred onto post-it notes and, following a Starter activity around how to structure ideas (including counter arguments), the class had to organise their post-it notes therefore creating their own writing frame.

As previous use of oral work had benefited E and allowed him to select information appropriately I wished to continue this. However, the use of writing frames had led to a dependence on them in his work so I decided to abandon their use. The success criteria for the class was heavily influenced by E's targets. E contributed well to the class feedback of homework ideas. Once the post-it notes were in their chosen order, pairs had to justify their organisation. E had made one potential 'error' (counter-argument was his final point despite our discussions about why this may be inappropriate in an argumentative essay). When questioned, he identified this and moved it.

The writing of the essay also went smoothly- each paragraph had three essential components that they had to include: Point (post-it notes), Evidence (quote or close reference), Link to the Question ('How this proves my argument'). E was happy

with this three-stage approach to the writing and completed the first draft on time. We had approached the task in a strong historical and factual manner which appealed to E and his work reflected this with its factual and scientific analysis of the book.

Success! E handed in the final draft on time and to a good standard. It was typed and had a few errors but it was much better than any previous work. I was surprised to see that he had moved his counter-argument *back* to its original position despite the paired discussion that had previously made him move it. This suggests that E moved it within the first draft without really understanding why. I awarded the essay a secure level 4, which is a huge leap from previous formative assessment.

The whole class thoroughly enjoyed the new planning process especially the Gifted and Talented students who were able to formulate their own ideas and express them with confidence. The project was inevitably having a positive effect on the class and my overall teaching. This was a pleasant feeling especially as I had felt guilty in past lessons for focusing so much on the two boys. Even GCSE and A Level classes I have used this with have flourished whilst using this approach to planning. This reaffirms my belief that teachers should be given more time for reflective study and build in time to study specific aspects of Teaching and Learning as they would have done during their PGCE study. The pressures (and excesses) of everyday teaching have inevitably led to a decline in the amount of time that teachers can dedicate to such work.

Summary

- Use of oral work to select appropriate information for writing was successful. Oral work is empowering and as students themselves realise, English is a good subject for this. How can we promote oral work across the curriculum to develop these skills?

- The new approach to planning was successful – fun and less restrictive and it made students confident to experiment.
- Support in class was slowly being withdrawn and E appeared to be responding well to increased confidence in his abilities to achieve, which was consolidated through praise.
- There was a clearer appreciation of the need for work to utilise his strengths (factual, opinions etc). Will this continue into Year 8 with a different teacher?

The second key assessment meant that E was able to use his own ideas and his love of factual information (see Reasons for Selection) to formulate his essay. The kinesthetic approach to planning suited his energetic class room behaviour and his sometimes 'haphazard' approach to writing. Surprisingly, the removal of writing frames had a very beneficial affect on the whole class and all ranges of abilities. Even the more able students benefited from the ability to branch out from the traditional, formulaic planning format and they embraced the chance to include extra ideas. As this was done at the end of Year the students were able to use all skills that they had collected throughout Year 7 therefore highlighting the progress they had all made both to them and to me.

It has undoubtedly affected my future teaching. I am now very wary of returning to an over-reliance on writing frames for all ages and abilities. It has highlighted the fact that many teachers feel that if they do not provide a strict writing frame they feel they may be criticised for not being supportive enough. I definitely felt this way. However, we hypocritically also lament the inability of A Level students to plan and structure an essay but how are they able to do that if they have never been taught it explicitly? This also applies to the process of proof-reading: do students know what we mean or should we model it repeatedly throughout the year? E has drawn attention to the fact that students know they should be doing it but do not know why.

CASE STUDY 2 – F

Reasons for selection

F is a quiet and subdued member of the class who is unwilling to participate in class discussions unless he is 100% sure that he will be correct and reluctant to complete written work of any form. His writing within lessons can be haphazard, rushed and often unrelated to the task at hand. Accuracy is poor (sentence structures can be very confused, spelling of common words is often incorrect, punctuation is rare) and he is unwilling to proof-read work that he has completed. During the student interviews conducted at the beginning of the project, he confessed to being 'Someone that is lazy... and doesn't put effort into work' whilst more worryingly, he also claimed that spellings 'make me feel stupid'. He had not expressed or hinted at this frustration in class but had instead covered it with a look of indifference and boredom. This was brought further into the spotlight when the class LSA told me that he is very vocal and 'naughty' in most of his other classes. When she asked another student about this difference, the classmate responded, 'F is scared of Miss Davies so he behaves for her'. While initially a potentially humorous response, it did make me realise that my frustrations with, and responses to his writing, may have made me a less approachable and tolerant teacher in his eyes. Obviously, this needed to be addressed.

F's feelings of frustration and 'stupidness' about spelling sheds some significant light on his lack of motivation and effort. He also mentioned in his interview that a dictionary on the table would help him but as he sat next to the dictionary shelf I doubt the validity of this statement – was he saying what he thought I wanted to hear?

F regularly failed to complete sustained pieces of writing due to a lack of concentration and/or motivation. Discussions with other teachers revealed that his brother is also notorious for this problem and there has been very little parental feedback on the matter. This is surprising as F claimed that he had considerable help and motivation from his parents at home. During his interviews, he claimed that his parents encouraged him to read many books including Jane Austen! He placed a lot of weight on the ability to read but was reluctant to transfer this to writing.

I wanted to focus on F for this writing project as he appeared to have made little progress over the first few months of Year 7 yet he seemed to have surprisingly limited awareness of the nature and extent of his problems, beyond his concerns about spelling.

Before we began reading our class novel, F was very vocal and willing to claim that he had read it before. However, it soon became apparent that he had not read it and I interpreted this as an attempt to impress both myself and his classmates, perhaps trying to cover up insecurities. This shows that despite seeming indifferent in class, he did want to learn and he did compare his standard of knowledge to his peers. I wanted to build upon this during the period of the project.

Q: What kind of writer are you?

F: Someone that is lazy, likes money and doesn't put effort into work. Doesn't do homework.

Q: If I start the lesson and say today we are doing writing what is the first thing that comes into your head?

F: Learning about Shakespeare for a whole term.

Q: What about if I say we are writing a story?

F: No offence, I would think this lesson might be boring.

What I wanted to achieve

1. For F to understand and focus on the task and organise himself to complete written work.

F will regularly forget to bring his book to school and has a very bad track record for homework, whether it is a written task or not. This obviously affects his ability to gain any consistency of approach or knowledge when preparing for a task or studying a subject. I wanted to encourage F to take more responsibility for his work so that he could refer to previous learning, which would assist him when engaging in specific tasks. If this failed, I thought that the use of a 'Classroom Only' exercise book – mentioned as a strategy on the first EMC project day – would be a good idea. I also wanted him to be more confident to ask for help if he did not understand a task in order to improve the appropriateness of his responses.

2. For F to begin to express his ideas coherently

F would not proof-read his work and even if he did, he had little expertise in identifying and amending errors. He did not enjoy writing tasks and would waste time but then rush the activity at the last minute without any consideration. This inevitably resulted in a large number of errors. F often struggled to express his ideas orally unless given 'thinking time' and conversations with him were very strained as he was often unable to express himself without becoming muddled. I felt that this needed to be addressed in order to influence his writing.

Early evidence

- His exercise book was messy, disjointed and had a lot of incomplete work in it. Even simple writing like headings and dates were neglected. There were many doodles within the book.
- There was no submission of assessed pieces of work due to 'lost' books or homework, forgetfulness or indifference.
- The LSA allocated to the class identified increasing behavioural problems in several subjects outside of English especially when completing written work.

My planned interventions

- Providing him with a 'Classroom Only' exercise book to minimise lost work and promote consistent class work. I would photocopy work if necessary, to ensure that nothing was lost.
- Teaching him proof-reading techniques and encouraging him to develop a habit of identifying his common mistakes
- Manipulating my use of writing frames to give him more effective help in structuring his ideas.

INTERVENTION 1

March 2008 – The First Attempt ...

The class was asked to do an imaginative account of a character from the book *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*. Everyone was provided with a potential format/frame for this page but it was made clear that this was optional. The first draft was completed in class following a class discussion and mind map. The class was asked to write up their work and submit it in the following week.

F responded with enthusiasm to this activity as it seemed that the selected character had caught his imagination. He decided to stick with the format

that I had given to him at first but then made small adjustments. His ideas were original and appropriate although accuracy was very poor. I repeated the 'teacher role play' proof-reading technique that I had used with E. F completed the proof-reading but he did not respond very enthusiastically to the approach as he wanted to 'get on with it'. Evidently, he was unable to see the value of altering errors even after a lengthy discussion. I asked him to ensure that he repeated the task when he completed the work at home. He was very keen to complete the work at home.

The work was several days late and he lost at least one draft of his work. I felt very disappointed that he could not recall the enthusiasm he had during previous lessons and he did not attempt to explain what had happened. F was given a second attempt with close supervision from the LSA who encouraged him to use his drawing skills. We made it very clear what his targets were: present work appropriately, interestingly and accurately. These clear boundaries obviously had some affect on him and he eventually submitted his *first* piece of assessed work in Year 7. The main part of assessment was accurate in terms of punctuation and spelling which indicates that he worked hard at proof-reading within the classroom. However, additional parts of the assessment that he had completed independently had a lot of poor punctuation etc. F seemed unable to connect the process of writing within school with that of his independent work. At this point I wondered whether establishing a standard routine when writing might help and decided to be explore that in the future.

The best part of the assessment was the drawings that accompanied the text and it told me a lot more about his understanding of the book than much of his writing did. His interpretation of the character was sympathetic and subtle while he also included several symbols around the outside of the text to illustrate his points, for instance the Star of David.

Summary

- The work on developing his proof-reading skills was moderately successful but needs to be sustained to ensure consistent improvement in his approach to written accuracy. It left me questioning how we get students to realise that it this an on-going skill? I think teachers' modelling approaches to proof-reading is required consistently across the curriculum.
- Direct support in class and clear targets were working but more independence at home and appreciation for work seemed to be needed.
- Poor organisational/ homework skills seemed to be hampering any development and needed to be addressed before we would see any independent improvement.
- The need to focus on student's individual skills, rather than whole class teaching seemed to becoming apparent – but I wonder whether this is appropriate for all tasks?

INTERVENTION 2

April 2008 – Second Assessment

The assessment was a summative argumentative essay about the suitability of *The Boy is the Striped Pyjamas* for children under 12 years old. (For full details see page 23.)

Q: What is your least favourite thing about writing?

F: Essays. It's long. Takes an hour or two just to do it. It's hard. You have to count the words.

F definitely maintained this view of writing, despite all planned interventions. However one of my interventions seemed to make a small difference, the use of the book that didn't leave the classroom.

F's 'Classroom Only' book meant that he finally had some continuity within his work that would help him finalise his ideas for the activity. He enjoyed collecting the book at the start of each lesson and the panicked attitude that he used to enter the classroom with when he had forgotten his book, had finally disappeared. This highlighted that vulnerable students who are having problems adapting to Secondary school could benefit from this provision.

F did not, however, respond well to the post-it notes activity as he claimed that it was childish, yet ironically, he used the post-its to stick on people's backs. He didn't understand why the strategy was being used and he showed little willingness to try, even with my direct support and that of the LSA. This problem generated difficult questions for me about the nature of working in this way on individual case studies; when should a teacher walk away and leave the student to help himself, when all else seems to be failing? I was unable to spend more time with F without neglecting the rest of the class and therefore had to weigh up the benefits. Due to the experimental nature of the activity, I felt that I was unjustified in spending more and more time with F at this point, as he was refusing to work. There were outside factors influencing his behaviour – he had recently been excluded and was being very closely monitored by his Head of Year. I felt that F therefore began to resent the extra attention I was giving to him as he connected this with punishment. The research we looked at when at EMC suggested that struggling boy writers can sometimes benefit purely from having attention paid to them and feeling that there is someone who cares, watching over what they are doing. In the case of F, the opposite seemed to be the case. He interpreted the attention as punitive rather than supportive.

He progressed very slowly and the final draft of his work did not appear despite a lot of encouragement. I felt annoyed with myself (and rightly or not, with him) that he had not made as much progress as E. However, it does highlight

the fact some students will progress at rates below the average. It highlights for me the complexity of attempting to address 'struggling boy writers' and shows how individual the process is – what works for one student may not work for another. It also made me think hard about balancing the needs of individuals against the needs of the class.

Summary

- The use of the 'Class Only' book was the only intervention I made that really did seem to make some difference, ensuring that what little writing F did was not lost and taking away from him some of the anxiety and pressure about organizing his own work
- Experimental or fresh approaches to planning essays will work for some students and not others. Individual students' prejudices can be hard to break down, as was evidenced by F's reluctance to participate fully in a more open-ended approach to essay planning.
- Direct support in class and clear targets can be helpful, depending on the student's state of mind but this is also influenced by external factors and influences, beyond the individual classroom. How do we offer support without adding to the pressure that some particularly vulnerable students may feel?
- Motivation for F is a major difficulty. Making use of F's artistic skills is often helpful but was inappropriate to this task. This could have contributed to his reluctance to engage with it. But I wonder if I can justify changing every task on this basis? This seems inappropriate and would poorly equip him for future tasks. This is a significant dilemma in addressing real unwillingness to write, as in the case of F.

F entered the school with a below average level and this did not seem to upset him. I have discovered a strange conflict between my dislike for students' over-enthusiasm/ obsession for their levels and others' disregard for their academic progress, like F.

It has become clear that using visual approaches to writing will help less able students like F to feel a sense of control over their writing but it is something that needs to be monitored to make sure that over a long period of time (and with changes of teacher) the student is developing fully, rather than being allowed to remain unchallenged.

The value of using LSAs has become very clear when supporting F. I believe that the attention from two separate teachers 'diluted' his sense of being targeted but unfortunately his issues outside of the classroom made further analysis of the role of the LSA very difficult. However simply discovering more about F and his behaviour and achievement in other lessons and around the school was very helpful in getting into perspective his achievements in writing in English.

My previous experiences with F had been mixed due to his introverted behaviour and apparent unwillingness to work. In some ways, not addressing his needs seemed easier than being forced to address them, as the complexity of his problems means that there is no quick fix or easy solution. Focusing attention on a student with such a complex set of issues risks taking time away from other students. This project has forced me to ask myself the difficult question that if F had not been targeted for this project, would I have been happier not accepting work from him for the sake of ease?

THE IMPACT OF THE PROJECT

The impact on my classes

My class was split between three teachers which meant that time was a huge factor. It was difficult to juggle the needs of the class and the focus of the project. CPD and professional research is hindered by everyday needs like these, which is a shame, as teachers should be constantly reflecting on their work without it becoming a chore. I am very grateful for the support of the EMC and the LSA who have made the work a lot easier. Again, it highlights the need for teachers to reach out to available resources and to manage their support properly. I don't believe that teachers are made fully aware of the help that is available in terms of outside resources such as the EMC. Simple encouragement and objective ideas about the issue was incredibly helpful. In my experience, I think that a lot of teachers (especially recently qualified teachers who feel the need to 'prove' their independence) can resist outside intervention in case it simply adds to the excessive pressures and workload of everyday teaching.

The support of the LSA was invaluable and once again, I don't feel that new teachers in particular are taught how to use LSAs. I very rarely quiz support assistants about the behaviour of students in other classes – why? Why shouldn't LSAs be involved in CPD projects that help their own understanding of the children and their influence on them? Having my LSA involved in the initial day at EMC was one small step towards this. The project has made me realise that I am wasting a very useful resource.

What's valued in writing – teachers, pupils and those who make judgements on teachers

What do teachers value and what do boys value? There must be a balance between encouraging students to value their own progress and the risk of this becoming entirely associated with levels. The current educational environment places a lot of value on tests and levels but is this beneficial?

This project focused on 'underachieving boys' who were level 3 in writing but it has highlighted for me that there are limits for each student that may not be exceeded for a substantial period of time. Therefore, how valuable is it to continually measure them in these terms? This runs the risk of demotivating them, rather than concentrating on the sustained and long-term strategies for improving their writing.

One other aspect of values that was demonstrated in the research on writing was the gap between what teachers may value and what boys show skill and interest in. E displayed a talent for non-fiction reading and when this was tapped into, he was able to use it to write in an appropriate style. His essay had a distinctly scientific and detached tone that was in direct contrast to many of the girls' essays which had a much more expansive and almost sentimental mood. As a female teacher, I have to assess my own values and what I consider to be the correct approach. I have not mentioned gender very often but it is an inevitable factor in understanding the two case studies, especially in relation to F who appears to be adopting a general male indifference to school-based learning.

Finally a point about the values of those who judge us as teachers, for instance, Senior Management or OFSTED. I found myself wondering how OFSTED would react to a lesson with an essay where they were not given a writing frame. Positive? Suspicious? Interestingly, through discussion with EMC and the other teachers I have begun to question my assumptions about what OFSTED might expect, particularly in the light of recent advice from within the Strategy itself that good practice should involve the *minimum* scaffolding for students to tackle a task, rather than the maximum. The climate in which we are practicing is such that there is fear of taking risks, even when the reality is that current advice promotes this.

The benefits of the project for my whole class teaching

Perhaps surprisingly, focusing on two individuals has had a great impact on my ability to teach the whole class. For example, I asked the children to respond to my marking of an assessment, with the intention of using E and F's answers, and the results were interesting. Three to four students expressed confusion at the term 'proof-reading' and told me that they did not know what this meant or involved. It is easy to forget as an adult that proof-reading is a skill that takes a lot of time to develop. Many boys simply responded to the grade ('thanks for my good level') which is a 'pet hate' of mine and confirms the mixed benefits of constantly referring to levels. Further investigation into the value of comment-only marking is vital to my own development as a professional. Following an inset day with Dylan William the issue surrounding AFL marking and comment-only marking has been made even more relevant for me.

He also highlighted the way that a lot of teacher's duties are made more difficult thanks to the pressure of 'appearing' to be supportive and fulfilling what are perceived to be the correct responsibilities of a teacher. This links clearly into my previous comments on the use of writing frames as evidence of supporting our children.

Being a reflective practitioner

As a teacher I have made many discoveries during the project that I know I will implement and develop for the rest of my teaching career, in particular the way over-reliance on writing frames can hinder the development of essay-writing and on the fact that other more flexible strategies can be offered. However, from the perspective of the individual students I focused on, I am very aware of the fact that the class may progress to a different teacher who may be reliant upon writing frames (as I was) and then the class will simply forget the independent skills they have developed with me. I feel very strongly that I now have a responsibility to model good practice and

encourage people to experiment as I have. The restrictions placed upon teachers in terms of paperwork, marking, assessment and planning however make it difficult for everyone to reflect and improve their teaching. This is something that stands in the way of teachers' ability to become reflective practitioners. I am hopeful that in my new school, Seven Kings, where two other teachers were involved in the Project, we will be able to take forward some of the thinking that has emerged and encourage others to try some of the strategies that seemed most useful.

APPENDICES

An essay – how to plan your comparison of the Pied Piper and The Lady of Shallot.

	The Pied Piper	The Lady of Shallot
What was the moral?		
Who were the main characters and how were they described?		
Pick an image that is particularly effective. Why did the poet use it?		
Pick a type of language that is used such as emotive or onomatopoeia. How does this make the reader feel?		

How to structure your essay

Introduction

You will need an introduction. This will say what a ballad is and what they try to do to the reader. Introduce the poems that you will be studying.

Possible sentence starters:

A ballad is a poem that tells us

I will be comparing the two poems

First paragraph:

Look at the moral behind 'The Pied Piper'. Explain what it is and how we can learn from it. Use a quote to support your ideas.

Second paragraph:

Look at 'The Lady of Shallot': what is the moral and what can we learn from it?

Possible sentence starters:

I think the moral of the poem is because....

The reader is warned that

Third paragraph:

Look at the way that 'The Pied Piper' uses imagery to describe what is going on. You must say WHY it's effective. You may use this model to help:

P- The poet uses imagery to describe the

E- We can see this in the line

E- This is effective because it makes us picture the And forces us to feel

Fourth paragraph:

Look at the way that 'The Lady of Shallot' uses imagery to describe the events. You can use the same model if you wish.

Fifth paragraph

Look at the way that language is used in 'The Pied Piper'. For example, we have studied onomatopoeia, repetition and emotive words. Pick one of these and explain why it is good.

Possible sentence starters:

The poet uses onomatopoeia to describe the

By using repetition, the reader starts to understand
.....

Sixth paragraph

Look at the way that language is used in 'The Lady of Shallot'. We looked at emotive words and adjectives. Pick one of these and explain why it is good.

Possible sentence starters

The poet describes the ? using adjectives.

This is effective because the reader can really see the ...

Conclusion

This must say what you think of the poems and what you have learned from them.

Use PEE in each paragraph:

Point is a statement that you must prove ('The poet uses emotive language in his poem to make us feel sorry for the character')

Evidence: this is a quote from the text ('We can see this in the line 'the distraught woman')

Explanation explains your idea- says how or why. 'The word 'distraught' is very strong and it makes us realise that she is incredibly upset. This makes us feel bad that she lost her true love.'

FATIMA CONTEH

Formerly Wanstead School
Currently Quintin Kynaston, Westminster

Aims

To investigate and understand the relationship between the identification of boys perceiving themselves as unsuccessful writers and their lack of motivation towards writing.

To use this understanding to improve practice, and develop a positive attitude of boys towards their writing.

STAGE 1

DIAGNOSING THE PROBLEMS

Case study 1 – G

G is a lively character in class. He is very vocal and imaginative in expressing his ideas orally. The main issue that I identified in his writing was that although he is able to articulate his ideas well during class discussions, he wrote very little when it came to putting his ideas into his books, if anything at all (appendices 1 and 1b). He also has poor handwriting and doesn't like the physical process of writing. At the start of the academic year (October 2007), before starting the project, I asked the class to complete a 'Writing Perception Survey' (appendix 2). Some responses that stood out are included here.

Apart from a clear negative perception of writing in his responses, his lack of motivation was further highlighted by the fact that he was unable to complete the survey and an LSA had to scribe the remainder of his responses for him. Before beginning the investigation I had no idea of where to begin in my attempt to change these perceptions of writing and when the opportunity arose, he immediately sprung to mind as being a perfect case study.

Q: Do you enjoy writing? Why?/Why not?

G: 'No because I can't be bothered.'

Q: Is there anything you don't like about writing?

G: 'Yes I hate it is so boring.'

Q: Are you a good writer?

G: 'No'

Q: Can you remember a piece of writing you did when you were younger that you were particularly proud of? Why was that?

G: 'No.'

Q: What do you think when a teacher says: 'Today we're going to do some writing.'?

G: 'Oh crap. I hate writing.'

Case study 2 – H

H is the complete opposite of G: shy, passive and very serious. The responses to the writing perception survey didn't show a negative attitude to writing but more the perception that he wasn't a good writer. Another interesting thing I picked out was his focus on levels. This immediately made me consider the damaging effect levelling work has in motivating boys to write. Some responses that stood out are included here.

Q: Are you a good writer?

H: 'I'm not that good a writer'

Q: Can you remember a piece of writing you did when you were younger that you were particularly proud of? Why was that?

H: 'Yes. I did a test and got a high level mark in it.'

Q: What do you think when a teacher says: 'Today we're going to do some writing'?

H: 'I thought that I couldn't wait to finish it to try to get a high level mark.'

The main issue I had identified in his writing is his struggle with structure. He has difficulties in shaping ideas, paragraphing and demarcation.

STAGE 2

THE BEGINNING OF THE JOURNEY

The first meeting of the EMC TDA Writing project was very important as it was an opportunity to set up the work I would be doing with my case studies. Sharing knowledge and understanding about the difficulties of writing for struggling boys with other teachers was very helpful in making the case studies more focused.

Prior to the meeting, I was given pre-reading material by the EMC, which outlined possible factors identified as accounting for the poor performance of boys in writing. There were several points that stood out to me, provoking me to think about the changes I could make to my practice that might help the boys with the areas they were struggling with.

The mention of the misuse and overuse of writing frames concerned me most; the pressure of end of unit assessments meant that, for a student like G, writing frames were relied on in order for a substantial amount of writing to be produced. The idea of boys being 'frustrated at their ideas being marginalised' made a lot of sense; it encouraged me to be more confident in focusing on the *process* of students learning how to think and plan their ideas more independently, rather than just the outcome.

I also found the mention of the ineffective use of ICT to enhance boys' writing interesting. Again, for a reluctant writer like G, because of his poor handwriting, the over-reliance on word-processing his writing troubled me and highlighted the damage I could potentially be causing by not dealing with the problem at hand: his resentment of the physical process of writing.

Lastly, the mention of problems with planning was also intriguing. The idea of boys perceiving planning to be a waste of time made me consider

the time spent on teaching students how and why it is important to plan. I began thinking about the variety of approaches I modelled and how I could differentiate the process in the future to allow students to independently find strategies that suit them best. The importance of avoiding over-mechanistic application became clear, in order to prevent disengagement from the composition process.

After pulling together and discussing the concerns highlighted, I conducted further interviews with the two case studies. This was videoed by the EMC to help study the findings closely. The following responses stood out:

G

Q: When you write and I mark it, what do you feel?

G: 'You made the right decision for my assessment.....(on his handwriting) Oh yeah it's actually quite bad ... not that good. I'm not very good at writing. My family's not very good at writing neatly. It's got a bad reputation for writing'

H

Q: What are you not so good at or find confusing?

H: 'Punctuation – commas, where to put them. Nothing else. It makes my grades go lower than they should be'

Says he likes writing in maths: 'It's easier to write than English. You have to think less about it'

STAGE 3

IDENTIFYING NEW STRATEGIES

After reflecting on what the students had said about their feelings towards writing and diagnosing the problems, the next stage was to identify strategies that I hadn't already tried, or wanted to try in different ways. A follow-up meeting was scheduled at the EMC to share, discuss and reflect findings with the other teachers involved in the project. Once more, it was very useful to share our concerns with each other and collaboratively think of new approaches and strategies to develop the writing of the targeted boys in our studies.

Diagnosis and initial strategies

G

Problems: A dislike of the physical process and poor handwriting, key in his lack of motivation to produce substantial pieces of writing.

Strategies

- Re-writing for display/presenting to others
- Model good handwriting
- Use 2 books, one for notes and rough work, the other for polished writing.

H

Problems: A struggle with structure and shaping ideas.

Strategies

- Experiment with a variety of writing frames/visual approaches
- Model proof-reading (highlighting sentences that lack clarity)
- Follow-up marking

Both boys clearly lacked self-esteem related to their writing, which for me was a great concern and perhaps the most significant problem to try to overcome.

STAGE 4

AN OBSERVATION LOG

28.04.08

I spoke to G at the beginning of the lesson today about the fact that I would be monitoring the amount of writing he produces at the end of every lesson and that I would be focussing on his handwriting presentation. He accepted this fact and focussed all through the lesson.

It was interesting watching him write as he had one hand supporting his forehead and was focussed for the whole lesson.

At the end of the lesson he voluntarily came to show me his book and I wrote an encouraging comment at the bottom of the page and a target to focus on for the next lesson (appendix 5). It was interesting to see how positively G responded to this extra attention, and the effort he put in knowing that his work would be immediately discussed at the end of the lesson.

12.05.08

Having checked G's book at the end of the lesson again today, he is surprisingly still on track! He is making a real effort to make his work neat and tidy (appendix 6).

13.05.08

I set up the end of unit assessment in today's lesson. I usually give all the students a support sheet to prompt ideas, and the weaker students a writing frame to structure their writing/motivate them to write.

G would normally have been given a writing frame and usually asks if he can fill in the gaps on the worksheet as this means less writing. On this occasion I only gave G the prompt sheet, which has a list of questions to generate ideas. He surprisingly wrote a lot more than usual and really got stuck in. Giving him this independence really encouraged him, as I made a point of telling him I didn't feel he needed it because he had demonstrated a lot of mature ideas about the novel we had been studying. I explained that I wanted him to have more freedom with his writing.

Perhaps writing frames are not as useful as we think – especially the ‘guess what I want you to write next’ ones, which appear to limit the students in thinking for themselves (and in the process frustrating them) rather than aiding the composition process! This was a concern I had during the initial stages of the project, after looking at factors identified as accounting for the poor performance of boys in writing.

19.05.08

I had the opportunity to mark G’s and H’s end of unit assessment with them during the lesson, whilst other students were working. Both boys had produced a significant amount of writing in the previous lesson.

G usually word processes his assessment piece with an LSA as he lacks motivation to physically write his ideas, so this piece of writing has been a real achievement (see appendix 7a). Before we started going through his work he told me he was feeling unwell and that he wanted to go to the medical room – an excuse he usually gives when becoming tired of writing. I convinced him to stay and he actually seemed to enjoy the dialogue we were able to have and the attention he was given. I marked the first two paragraphs with him and gave him a pencil to mark the rest using the targets I had given him, which he did very well. Again, this highlighted the benefits of giving extra attention to struggling students: positive relationships, trusting relationships are built.

H appeared to find the dialogue we had about his work helpful, as he has a problem with structuring his ideas. I used the same process I used with G, giving him targets to improve the rest of his work.

The other students accepted the fact that I spent a significant part of the lesson with the two boys and focussed on their work, as guided writing has been regularly integrated into lessons.

Guided writing provides an additional supported step towards independent writing. Through guided writing, children are supported during the different stages of the writing process. It allows the teacher to work closely with a small number of students to develop different areas of writing at a personalised level.

20.05.08

Meeting with Albany and John Hickman was really encouraging as it was a chance to really reflect on progress made. I feel that perhaps I am focusing more on G than I am on H however. It was interesting looking back at the boy’s ‘Writing Perception Survey’ responses – G starts off stating how much he hates writing and then towards the end the LSA which supports the class had to complete his responses for him!! H’s responses reminded me that we really need to do more creative writing. I plan to have fun after half term with a creative writing unit. It is important to ensure that students enjoy writing and not only view writing as something to be judged and assessed. I can’t wait – in fact I think I will join them and get my creative juices flowing too!

Also, I found out that G was sent home ill yesterday after my lesson. It wasn’t an excuse after all! I feel slightly bad, however the fact that he chose to persevere in my lesson does say a lot. Perhaps it is because of the attention given and the relationship we have built throughout the year. Or maybe, just maybe, he now loves writing so much he wanted to stay to finish his piece!!!

9.06.08

G volunteered to work in the library so that he could focus on re-drafting his literature essay without distraction. I have told him that he doesn’t have to re-write all of it, and that he should select his best bits (I don’t want to kill motivation to write – as pointed out by John in our last meeting). I gave him a handwriting frame (a sheet of plain paper with guidelines to help him form his letters properly – see appendix 7b) , which has really helped his presentation – perhaps it is worth investing in exercise books which offer this support.

14.07.08

To focus on H’s difficulty with structure and his difficulties in shaping ideas, Michael Simons from EMC worked with him and another student on ‘Movie Power’. This software offers the opportunity for students to create short moving image sequences, with scripted voice-over. The genre the pair focussed on was documentary, combining movie clips and a script reporting on the environment (see appendix 8)

Watching the video clip was very interesting. The following observations were made:

H is a little less passive than usual, but still appears to need prompting or 'modelling' of how to draft ideas. He appears to lean back in his seat at times and put his head in his hand happy for X (not part of case study) to take the lead. H has to invite him to negotiate his ideas/write ideas down. Perhaps I am reading too much into this, but his body language suggests that the task of having to structure ideas is too much to handle. It is only when X begins to break the sections down/suggest possible ideas for them to negotiate that he appears more relaxed. Post-its spring to mind, as perhaps an effective tool to help a student like H structure ideas – offering limited space to write and the option to move ideas around. Also, it is interesting that when H is typing, he accepts exactly what X dictates he should type, however, when X is typing, he re-drafts their initial ideas before noting down their final script. This is interesting as H tends to write exactly what pops into his head – he doesn't appear to stop and edit his thoughts to make them clear. This I believe to be part of the problem preventing H from structuring clear sentences and construct cohesive paragraphs when writing. Planning, highlighted as an area of concern during the initial stages of the study, and how it is taught, is clearly crucial to the success of boys' writing. This is more complex than I thought however; for some students the actual thinking and negotiating process, before putting ideas down on paper during the planning stage needs to be made more explicit.

X is much more vocal than usual – he is usually quite shy in the classroom. I am impressed at how he is able to ensure that H takes part in the drafting process by regularly asking him his opinion. It is also clear that the negotiating process of 'pair/group' work needs to be more explicit.

Both boys were really proud when showing the clip to the rest of the class. They received a 'standing ovation' (8.1 are very encouraging to each other) and H gave a modest smile. It was a real boost for their confidence.

CONCLUSIONS

Knowing our students

Most importantly, knowing our students well is crucial to raising attainment, especially regarding boys' writing. This was reflected in the way the students responded to the extra attention given and the significant improvements made in their writing. Frequent guided writing is important to allow the teacher to work closely with a small number of students and develop different areas of writing at a personalised level. There are huge implications for large classes however, where the practicality of the amount of time given to students is clearly limited.

Reflective teaching logs

The most effective forms of research are probably self-initiated. It is important to value your own judgement of students and to allow time to get to know them. Looking at student's levels and reports prior to own assessment can be damaging as presumptions may be inaccurate and information misinterpreted.

My observation log has really highlighted to me the importance of being a reflective practitioner and the value of recording reflections for future reference. This is a practice which regularly took place during my teacher training two years ago. Although I consciously reflect on my practice as part of the planning process, I have not kept a formal written log since beginning teaching. Having a written record of my thinking has given me a great sense of achievement and has enabled me to reflect not only on the case study students but on the research process. Reading over my findings has demonstrated to me that allowing research to direct itself organically has great benefits.

The importance of handwriting

Surprisingly, the importance of handwriting in relation to the motivation of writing is crucial in raising attainment of boy's writing. It is no

good ignoring illegible handwriting and poor presentation, as the students clearly see what is on the page and if they do not like what they see, they are likely to want to prevent the teacher from seeing it.

Emphasis on improving handwriting seems to stop at Key Stage 2. The basic rules of good handwriting needs to be consistently more explicit as the target 'improve presentation' is clearly too vague for the students concerned. It is important to specify why handwriting is poor i.e. the heights of letters, the spaces between words, letters which are best left unjoined, which letters join at the top horizontally and letters which join from the bottom diagonally. G's use of a handwriting frame, to redraft part of an assessment essay made a remarkable difference to his handwriting. Attitudes to writing can be changed simply by improving students' handwriting. The confidence of being a good writer will inevitably motivate boys to write.

The pressures of targets and testing

APP is clearly extremely important for the teacher in raising pupil's achievement. The role of attainment targets was to 'establish what children should normally be expected to know, understand and be able to do at around the ages of 7, 11, 14 and 16 and enable the progress of each child to be measured against established national standards' (William, 2001, p.2). Sadly, however, the rationale for national testing is the opportunity to make the results for each school public to provide a performance indicator of the quality of provision within the school.

Having been part of the TDA Writing Project, the implications for students who are not in the 'D to C' or 'B to A' range is a concern. The fact that these students may be neglected due to the pressure created by league tables, suggests that the relationships that I was able to build with the boys in my case studies – clearly beneficial in raising attainment and confidence – may rarely occur within the classroom.

As demonstrated in the case studies formative and diagnostic assessments are far more beneficial to the pupil's learning. The frustrating thing is that the way in which the system of attainment targets is set, summative and evaluative assessment will always have more weight and importance for students and parents. To improve boys' perception of writing, formative and diagnostic assessment needs to be given more importance by the teacher, allowing a platform for a recorded reflection from the students and ongoing dialogue. We can't get away from levels, but we have an important role as teachers to avoid them having a damaging effect on students and their perception of themselves as writers.

Preparation of pupils for standard tests at Key Stage 3 and external examinations at Key Stage 4 can easily distract from the need to give wide-ranging feedback to pupils to improve their general achievement in the subject. It is easy to get so submerged in the language of assessment (summative/formative, normative/criterion referenced; validity/reliability) that one loses any real insight into the tensions and issues at the heart of the process' (Flemings & Stevens, 2004, p.114)

CAT scores/results are supposed to provide a 'unique' contribution to an assessment of the abilities and potential of each pupil and their implications for teaching and learning. However there is clearly nothing more informative and valuable than knowing the students in your class. Feedback from students and simply observing habits within the classroom is what really provides a unique contribution in developing the abilities and potential of each pupil and teaching and learning.

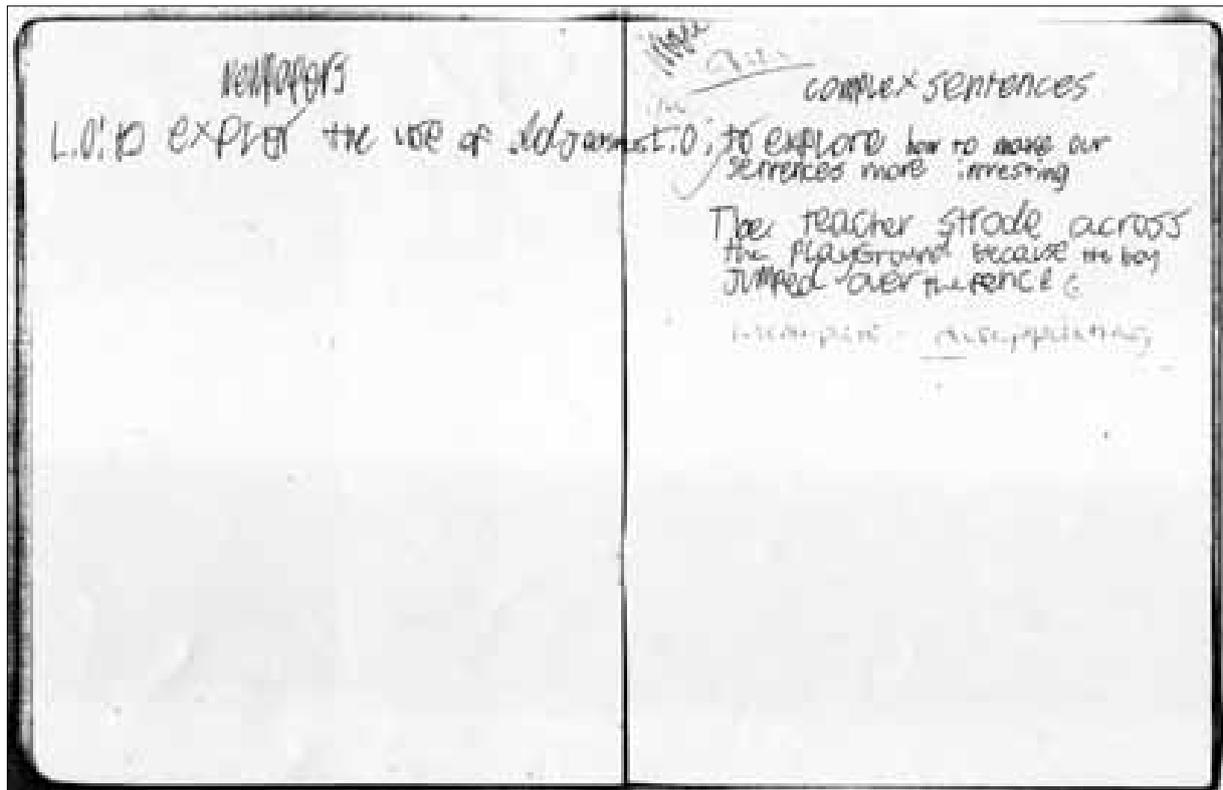
Hearing what students have to say

Student voice and feedback have been very insightful additions to a teacher's repertoire; a whole new dimension to APP. The responses in the Writing Perception Surveys have helped me gain a greater understanding of the negative affects attainment levels can potentially have

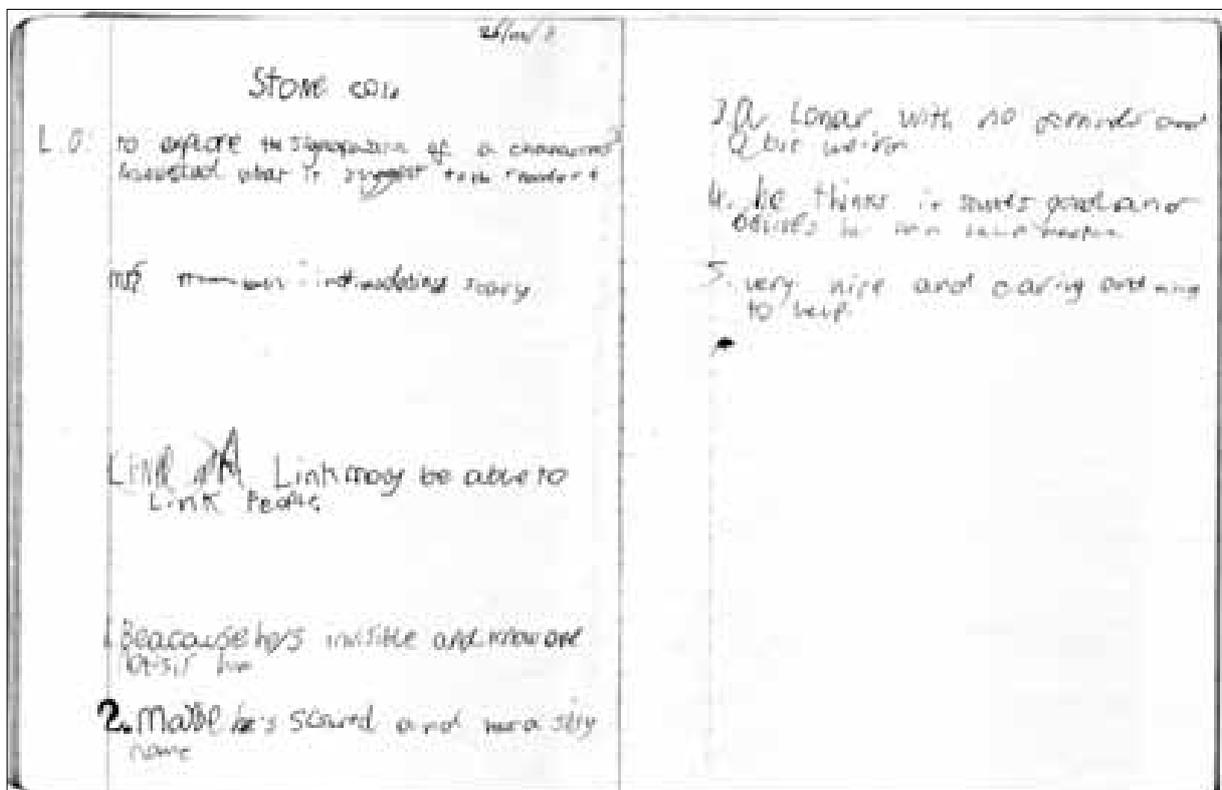
on students. Although William suggests that 'it does make sense to talk about what the average student at any given age will be able to do, because this not need be the same student at each age' (2001, p.10), I would have to argue who benefits from such a discussion? Who does it benefit to know that a pupil may be average at the age of 7, but below average by the age of 11, and that this same student may between the ages of 11 and 14, experience a 'spurt' of growth in attainment and at age 14 be well above the average? Such a case does not only highlight the complexity of attainment levels, but how confusing it can be for the person who matters most, the student. It does not help to know whether you are average, below or above average as this assessment can never make 'real' sense. The 'consequence of the emphasis on external systems of assessment designed for accountability is that it can distract from the more important role of assessment in informing and improving teaching and learning' (Flemings & Stevens, 2004, p.113).

The KS2 National tests are perhaps where the student's obsession with their levels begins. In their attempt to measure their performance against their peers, with very little understanding of what the levels mean, confidence is lessened for many and the enjoyment of learning perhaps taken away.

APPENDICES



Appendix 1a



Appendix 1b

Writing Perception Survey

1. Do you enjoy writing? Why? Why not?
no because I can't be bothered
2. Is there anything you don't like about writing?
yes not being able to write
3. Are you a good writer?
no
4. Can you remember a piece of writing you did when you were younger that you were particularly proud of? Why was that?
no
5. What do you think when your teacher says: 'today we're going to do some writing?'
oh ok OK OK OK
6. What's the best piece of writing you've done recently? What was good about it?
my book and I like it because I had something about the world and I did it very well
7. Do you ever write at home for your own pleasure?
no
8. Do you ever draw at home?
yes for fun
9. Does anyone else write or draw at home?
my brother always does

Appendix 2

Writing Perception Survey

1. Do you enjoy writing? Why? Why not?
I don't enjoy writing because I can't make up stories
2. Is there anything you don't like about writing?
when I have to do some writing in school
3. Are you a good writer?
I'm not that good at writing
4. Can you remember a piece of writing you did when you were younger that you were particularly proud of? Why was that?
yes I did a book and I got an A+ for it
5. What do you think when your teacher says: 'today we're going to do some writing?'
I thought 'oh I can't write it' it's like I got a high level mark
6. What's the best piece of writing you've done recently? What was good about it?
my book I did a book and I got an A+ for it and I did it very well
7. Do you ever write at home for your own pleasure?
no
8. Do you ever draw at home?
no
9. Does anyone else write or draw at home?
my little sister does and she

Appendix 3

In the morning when we landed I was the first out of everyone in the aeroplane "Slow down the world isn't going to end it you won't see Egypt! Dad said I think he found me annoying because I couldn't stop talking about Egypt." So we go visit the pyramid I said my heart was racing with excitement "no no, yet we'll go visit the museum first." Just because of the new museum manager I said angrily "listen to what your dad says." Dad said when we went into the museum I saw a sign on the wall that said "I saw a sign on the wall that said 'go away go away from this place.'" Dad said "why" and said "because I was angry at the museum because it's probably not for you." Dad said "I don't know what happened to me when we opened the door because it would ruin the trip for me so I said only one thing." So we go to the pyramid now I said "then dad said and said 'since then'."

Appendix 4

Link and Shelter are the narrators of the story Stone Cold. They both give different perspectives about homelessness and homeless people. During the story Link and Shelter share their emotions with the reader. In the story Robert Swindells uses

Appendix 7b

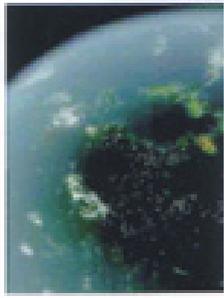
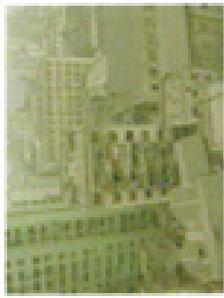
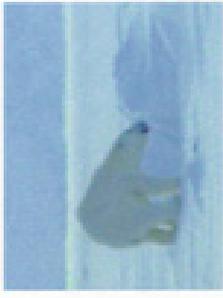
Vincent forces Link to move out. Link moves in with his sister Cora who is four years older. After a while Link stops going to school and starts begging on the street for bread. At Christmas Link leaves to London and took 150£. When he gets to London he rents out a flat and stayed there for a night.

Appendix 7b

File Edit Movies Display Sound Go to

Storyboard for: Planet Earth

File Name:

<p>1</p>  <p>Title 1 00:05:00</p> <p>[Music]</p>	<p>2</p>  <p>Planet earth 00:05:16</p> <p>The earth's ozone is being disturbed by global warming and pollution</p>	<p>3</p>  <p>Tower blocks 00:05:03</p> <p>[Music]</p>	<p>4</p>  <p>Crowd 00:08:16</p> <p>The everyday people, some do not know or care about the effects of global warming.</p>
<p>5</p>  <p>Clouds 00:03:04</p> <p>[Music]</p>	<p>6</p>  <p>Iceberg melt 00:04:23</p> <p>Icebergs are melting because of global warming</p>	<p>7</p>  <p>Logging 00:08:00</p> <p>Trees are being cut down in the Amazon, they are the lungs of our planet.</p>	<p>8</p>  <p>Polar bear 00:04:14</p> <p>Ice is melting because of the extreme heat from global warming.</p>

User Name:

AISHA BEGUM

Seven Kings High School

Michael and Barbara of the English & Media Centre (EMC) approached Seven Kings High School to participate in a piece of action research focusing on boys' writing. I was interested in learning more about the project and attended the launch conference hosted by the EMC in Highbury. The aims of the conference were to establish the scope and details of the project and begin to explore how to engage reluctant boy writers in the classroom. We met with the 3 other participating schools and discussed commonalities and differences in our respective teaching experiences. We reviewed a number of theoretical articles discussing the blockages faced by boys and how teachers can work with the obstacles in order to develop confidence in boys' perceptions about writing and possible intervention techniques in developing engagement in the writing process. As a recently qualified teacher I was interested in developing my repertoire of skills in the classroom and address a pertinent educational issue, where many boys in my classrooms are reluctant writers.

CASE STUDIES

M is a 12-year-old boy who had no SAT scores coming into Year 7; he is a 2nd generation British Sri Lankan and English is not his first language. M's mother is extremely ambitious for her son and wants him to achieve A grades, an issue that raised concerns at the annual parents evening where M's Head of Year picked up on tensions between parental aspiration and reality, and I's anxiety at being a weaker student.

J is also a 12-year-old boy with mixed English and Pakistani heritage living with a foster carer. His

mother is very supportive and encouraging and he also benefits from having a sister who is a trainee English teacher. J achieved Level 4s in his KS2 SATs for Maths, Science and English. Both boys are friends in the same form and have been in the same class since Year 7. Both boys are also physically much smaller than their peers.

The case studies were chosen because the boys were under achieving and not engaging with the work as well as the other students. This was ascertained from their classroom behaviour, classroom contributions, and books where work was frequently incomplete and their presentation of writing and work was scrappy and unkempt. Also there was a discrepancy between their aspirations and their actual writing ability. I wanted to see whether participation in the project would increase their motivation and thereby raise their achievements in writing and learning across the curriculum.

Both students were positive about being tracked and were pleased to be the subjects of the project. During the initial interview stage both students recognised why I had picked them over their peers to participate in the project. They also agreed that they weren't doing as well as they should do. They wanted to be good writers, they had an idea of what made a good writer, but they were not able to execute their knowledge in the classroom.

The boys needed to focus on their sustained writing as both had difficulties writing more than a few sentences and completing a piece of class work. A short concentration span was a major stumbling block in their writing; both had a tendency to drift into football conversations or agonise over a sentence or a phrase and not come anywhere near to completing a piece of work. Interestingly though this was not the case with end of unit assessment pieces where the boys understood that the marks would be published in the summer report and this spurred them on to work well. It was mainly around classroom writing tasks that they struggled to focus and complete work.

INITIAL INTERVIEWS

Prior to the launch conference I conducted a video interview with the two case study boys, both boys being interviewed together. The interview highlighted a number of interesting points. The boys agreed with each other on several issues. M and J both enjoyed creative writing, stories, scripts and poetry. J enjoyed writing newspaper articles as well. Both boys agreed that comprehension was 'pointless' and 'boring'. This was a fascinating revelation because the boys understood the format of the questions and understood that weaker writers like themselves were excluded from the higher order questions through the way they needed to be answered, even though they know what they need to think in order to get the right answer. They recognised their language and writing deficiencies contributed to their failure to score highly in comprehension style questions (a worrying consideration as GCSE Paper 1 relies on this method to extend the examinee).

Both boys enjoyed reading books in primary school and cited Harry Potter as one of their favourite fictional characters. The boys argued that fiction was best as it let you learn about different things and enjoy the creative elements in them.

The boys prefer to word process their writing as opposed to handwriting, as in a book you cannot hide messy writing and remove edited drafts. They derive most pleasure from only seeing and presenting a clean copy of writing. Also the editing features of a word processor are more attractive as they make the writing process look more fluent and letter formation doesn't deteriorate as a result of aching hands; plus the squiggly lines under misspelt words and incorrect grammar helps improve their writing as they experiment with word order and a thesaurus to correct and improve the sentence. Both boys print their writing, though J's writing is showing some elements of cursive writing. Typing allows them to compose in a more relaxed fashion physically because they use 'two fingers' instead of a whole hand, and the edit functions mean that no one sees their 'rubbish/scrapped work'. This links to the

boys' discussions about writing fatigue. They are comfortable using their hands to manipulate games consoles but lacked the stamina to use a pen. As a result of hearing this on the video, I considered the possibility of doing more with my students on handwriting. Writing practice and exercises is something that I wanted to develop into lesson starters, and maybe have prizes for most improved handwriting.

Another interesting area that emerged from the interviews was the question of pleasure and motivation. The boys had experienced teacher celebrations of written work in primary school where work was displayed prominently. It was notable, however, that there hadn't been a similar opportunity in secondary school. Both boys agreed that the work in secondary school was much harder and that it always included writing and that writing too much was tiring. Every lesson (apart from Drama and PE) requires writing and this was a major change from primary school. Both boys agreed they are creative writers rather than technical writers as they like to write to entertain.

Both boys had interesting comments with respect to marking; they liked having their books marked often and enjoyed reading the comments. Merits are always prized and the boys ask for them if they feel they have made a good contribution to lessons or produced a piece of work of which they're proud. The boys agreed there are problems with the legibility of some teachers' handwriting and they recommended a sticker system where a code shows what they are doing well and what they need to improve upon. They also agreed that dialogue is ideal between teacher and student and frequent marking of books allows for a private conversation to occur in books. They also commented that the repetition of assessment targets was discouraging and that they wanted new targets on which to focus as well as the usual ones.

Though the issue of marking and teacher/pupil dialogue didn't become my prime focus for the project, it was something that cropped up in meetings and made me think about my

own approaches. On the third review meeting Matt from Mayfield discussed his new ritualised approach to writing and feedback. This made me think about giving appropriate time at the beginning of lessons after returning books to let students digest and absorb comments, sign merits, clarify queries and questions first rather than rush on and 'start' the lessons. Also students love to read each other's comments and it heightens the sense of a learning community.

As a result of the first interviews and the initial meeting at the English and Media Centre, I came up with an action plan for my case studies, deciding to focus on a few key ideas:

- helping with handwriting
- looking at the ways in which the boys collaborate over writing, in pairs or group work
- introducing more visual approaches.

A RANGE OF INTERVENTIONS

An early intervention was to change the seating plan. M was already sitting near the teacher desk and J was moved nearer to M in order to allow more dialogue between the boys. The first unit of work where I planned more visual lessons to encourage their writing was about poetry. This was one strategy that had been identified as having a positive impact on boys' writing, at the EMC first project day.

The entire Year 8 cohort had recently participated in a Poetry Performance and I decided to develop the ideas from the event and maintain a familiar theme for the first intervention sessions, especially after both boys had declared an interest in poetry and lyrics. J revealed that he writes lyrics at home and enjoyed the literary freedom writing lyrics gave him to express himself. M similarly indicated a tendency towards poetry because it was compact and fun to write and read out loud to an audience, again relating back to their visions of themselves as creative writers.

Offering freedom and choice

A set of creative poetry activities devised by the EMC, 'Behind the Door', was modified for the whole class. Students were given a range of entry points to write their own poetry. The first task was to write a poem having been given a title 'Behind the Door.' M and J both enjoyed the liberation of being given a title for a poem. They said that usually they would have spent ten to fifteen minutes thinking about an appropriate title and waste the allocated writing time. Also discussing the possible moods and emotions behind the simple phrase allowed them to visualise and verbalise the predominant themes and ideas in their poem. This raised the question of appropriate and useful scaffolding tools to structure their work. Similarly this could be used for stories and other creative activities. In a whole class situation it is useful to be more directive to the weaker students and still give more able students the choice to think of their own titles. Once the boys were given the titles they settled into working much more quickly as thinking of a suitably good title did stall them. Being given the option to modify the given title encouraged them to redraft and edit the title once they thought up their own as well. This is something I will definitely do with other classes and can see it working well in GCSE Original Writing coursework.

Collaborating over writing

The drama activity 'Behind the Door' was equally popular with all students who enjoyed creating and converting a collaborative script into a collaborative poem and appreciated the variation and conventions of each writing genre. M found this more difficult as he is shy and wasn't comfortable sharing his drama piece with his peers. J on the other hand relished the opportunity to share the work and showcase his imaginative skills in the composition. This made me realise that each individual is different and the strategies that engage one student may not be equally successful for another.

M worked in a pair for a composition of a play script entitled 'Behind the Door'. His group managed to produce a well planned and engaging piece of writing. The presentation of the theme and topic was useful to M who quickly visualised the scenario and came up with a number of openings. Having a partner helped the editing process and allowed him to test his vocabulary and extend his repertoire of words to make the scene more tense and interesting. The short dialogue of the extract was less daunting than writing a story or an essay.

Tasks that require long extended pieces are off putting to students like M and this is something that I will plan in future to alleviate lack of focus and boredom. I found myself questioning the pros and cons of collaborative versus individual writing. Maybe having students doing team writing can help to develop stamina and confidence in their creative writing ability. This can be useful in building confidence and team work skills. However it isn't going to be useful in developing independent work skills and generating ideas for exam situations. M works well in groups though he is very quick to defer editing responsibility to the stronger writer. He is keen to encourage his partner's ideas and edit writing when he thinks a better alternative is presented. He has a tendency to become very quiet and is sometimes a little shy of offering his thoughts in case they are wrong or 'not good enough'. This is something that I have observed in other students who measure themselves against the stronger writers and label themselves bad writers. As a result of this I have started to make my task explanations very clear and ensure that everyone knows exactly what to do as well as reinforce instructions on the board. Also I aim to instil in all students the idea that writers do not dream up a perfect piece of writing and reinforce the importance of editing, proofreading and drafting. All of this may contribute to allowing students to take away the lessons from collaborative writing and apply them to their own individual writing.

Filming collaborative writing

As part of the research a classroom film was made of the two case study students doing collaborative writing. Michael, the Director of the EMC filmed a writing lesson where students had to interpret a photo picture of a famous London landmark and sell it as a worth while attraction. The students were not given any examples of what a guide entry might look or sound like; only the phrase 'Come to....' was offered as a starting point for the writing. M worked in a pair with another student, Keshav and he showed signs of taking a back seat when it came to the actual composition. He is a very generous listener and was responding positively to the other student's ideas. He enjoyed the collaborative work and at one point when the boys construct a good sentence M exclaims 'that is wicked!' He clearly enjoyed the creative writing and was proud of the work that they composed, though interestingly he didn't volunteer to read aloud the extract leaving Keshav to read out the joint piece.

Both pairs worked well together, sharing ideas and offering praise and guidance where appropriate. J enjoyed working with Ailie (an academically strong female student) who often led the discussion but allowed J to offer his ideas and also helped to hone his sentence structures to a more sophisticated level, something that he enjoyed observing as it made him feel like he had ownership of the original idea. One key observation with J is that writing time is a major issue especially as he usually misspends lesson time daydreaming or gossiping. However in this lesson where he was losing time through discussion there is a moment where he says 'oh no!' when the time limit is looming. J said in interview that he prefers writing at home where he is comfortable and has no time constraints limiting his work. This highlights the conflicts of planning; with hour long, four part lessons as a teacher one feels the need to move on to the next activity in the search for pace and variety, and the opportunity to allow students to think, revise and talk through ideas is lost. As a newly qualified

teacher I had been reluctant to let lessons roll over an hour. On reflection, watching how J worked with Ailie, and seeing how long they needed to discuss and write, it made me think that I would try being less slavish in following lesson plans and allow more flexibility with timings for writing activities. It also made me think about the pairings and how much the organisation of groups is integral to the success of the task and how this is something that has to be planned in advance for all students. I was genuinely surprised to see how much J got out of working with a much more able student, Ailie, and equally how her own skills of negotiation and cooperation were being tested and honed.

M was working with Keshav, a very good reader and writer who loves experimenting with words and ideas. Their description of the Science Museum was very inventive and M enjoyed the insertion of humour and complex vocabulary. It was interesting to see that M was very reserved in the exchange and deferred most power to Keshav who managed the situation very maturely and always consulted with M to ensure that a consensus was met at each point of change. M did not want to read the work as he didn't feel like it was entirely his writing and wouldn't want the other students to praise him for work that wasn't all his own. This was very interesting to me, in showing how M recognised how much had been his contribution and his own limitations and perhaps remained rather insecure about his own ability to take credit. J on the other hand wanted their work read out and celebrated by the rest of the class highlighting the importance of praise in the classroom. He wanted to be seen to be successful, and wanted recognition from his peers that he could do well and achieve highly in an area which he finds difficult. It is easy to praise brighter students for being inventive and witty in their writing so it was a conscious effort to spot the boys writing well in order to publicly praise their ideas and descriptions.

Intervening over handwriting

M and J both were concerned about the quality and clarity of their handwriting. As a result Jane Waters (Deputy Head and English teacher) set up a handwriting club to help students work on and improve their writing. Although the classes were well-attended, unfortunately the two case study boys failed to attend. They were comfortable talking to me about their difficulties on film but were not prepared to come to a class and identify themselves as students who need 'extra' attention. This was a disappointment as there was a mismatch between their desires and motivation. When questioned they said they would rather play football at lunchtime. This led me to consider allocating ten to fifteen minutes per week on handwriting practice in books as a starter activity which means all students benefit and settle into lessons calmly. This also avoids singling out the weaker students and allows them to focus on letter formation in a less threatening environment.

END OF YEAR EXAMS

The summer exams are an important event for Seven Kings students as they are used as a bench mark for progress in their subjects. We spent a lesson practicing reading tasks implicitly through poetry work and explicitly through drafting speeches on specific subjects. J didn't do as well in the exam as expected, and when questioned on reasons for his poor marks he confirmed that he didn't have a good day and couldn't think of anything to write. The Reading paper was completed with him missing the higher order higher mark questions; though it was on the writing task that he really disappointed himself as he merely wrote a few paragraphs. In contrast to the exam performance the revision task completed in lesson shows that he is able to manipulate the rhetorical devices and write engaging text. He did fail to finish the speech appropriately but nonetheless he follows the instructions and manages to demonstrate an understanding of how to use a variety of techniques. He did mention that the class was made to work in silence by the cover

teacher and this is something to consider when dealing with students who are easily distracted; giving them no choice but to work in silence may limit the opportunity to become distracted.

M's performance in the summer exams was excellent: he completed a good reading paper and wrote a very convincing analysis of a speech by Jesse Jackson. He used accurate quotes to justify his ideas and discussed Jackson's word choices and effect in detail. His comments that the speech made people feel 'brave' were perceptive and showed his developing sophistication as a reader. The extended commentary is evidence of M's concentration skills and though the extract is a touch rambling he sustains his argument. M was determined to do well in the exams and had revised the required skills for comprehension and reading, as well as taking on board the benefits of writing in full sentences. The competitive nature of exams forced M to step up and prove to himself that he is an improving student – which he rightly is.

CONCLUSION – THE IMPACT OF THE PROJECT

For me it was a delight tracking M and J. They showed that they do care about their studies and are keen to develop into successful learners, something I hadn't fully realised before. I found it extremely interesting to be able to watch them on video, both in the initial interviews and the classroom videos. As I said at the Department meeting we held at the end of the Project, it was like entering a secret world. Wandering round the classroom I had never been very clear about what happened in these collaborative exchanges. Now I could look closely at what was happening and hear what the students were saying. It made me think that they were getting a lot more out of it than I had realised. It also made me question more the dynamics of collaborative writing and think about whether same ability or different ability pairings are a good idea.

The main considerations I will make for lesson planning is to think more about ways of allowing all types of learners to access the work. The boys definitely responded better to more visual tasks as well as collaborative tasks. They enjoyed working with each other where they were more academically equal as well as working with more able students. An important factor is that the class is very friendly and supportive which helps the boys to not feel panicked and pressured when sharing work and feeling inadequate; this is something that a good teacher can capitalise on and nurture.

Positive praise for all good work is also something with which I need to be more generous. The student interviews made me more aware of this, as did the reactions of J in particular to being able to read out his pair writing and receive public praise. Students need to feel good about being in a lesson and they need to feel safe to make the mistakes that will further their competency and skill in writing.

JANE WATERS

Seven Kings High School

MY AIMS

My concerns when first embarking on this project did not lie in motivating students to write. Rather I was trying to find a balance between the ethos of a writing workshop, which encourages writing per se and enables students to find their voices through enjoyable, engaging activities and a more targeted intervention in students' progress as writers to improve the quality of what they produce.

On the first day of the project we looked at some of the research about boys and writing and I was particularly struck by the findings about 'the over rigid application of any form of intervention' especially where the writer has low self esteem about their own writing. Having the time and support to study objectively the progress and characteristics of my two writers, what was brought home to me was the preconceived views I held of what good practice is in the teaching of writing.

My concerns regarding the teaching of writing when setting out on this project were primarily centred on intervention. If a student is to be able to engage with the genre model as promoted by the National Curriculum and examinations at KS3 surely he needs to have first developed his own 'voice' and be able to write confidently and engage the reader as described by AF1 and AF2 of the Writing Assessment Foci before interacting with non-fiction or content outside of his own experiences. Thus, there is a dilemma in the classroom as to *when* to intervene, as a student is learning the craft of writing in their own voice and *how* to intervene during the writing process. This dilemma is writ large with students who do not perceive themselves as writers.

The 'when' to intervene and 'how' to intervene became an overwhelming concern especially when working with year 7 students who tend to enter secondary school with a rigid framework instilled in them in readiness for the Key Stage 2 SATs examinations and thus my concern was that in going beyond writing for enjoyment to intervening to effect improvements, I would simply perpetuate this attitude towards writing.

I was interested to see what the impact might be of interventions on two boys, K and L, both with quite different personalities, strengths and weaknesses, and whether similar approaches would be beneficial to either or both of them.

CASE STUDY 1 – K

FIRST INTERVIEW WITH K

Before the first project day at EMC, we were encouraged to interview the students to find out more about their attitudes to writing. This in itself proved to be an interesting and valuable starting-point for thinking about them as writers.

Although K stated in an early interview that he didn't really know why he hated English, interestingly when questioned further it was clear that he perceived the question to be about his handwriting. We had discussed handwriting on the first day of the project at the English and Media Centre as a result of looking at the research on boys and writing. Nearly all the boys involved in the project across the three schools had commented negatively on their handwriting in their videoed interviews and clearly this continued to affect their own perceptions of themselves as writers and thus their perceptions of themselves as learners. When further questioned about his handwriting K explained that several of his teachers consistently commented on his handwriting when marking his books. Noticeably in his interview, K had commented that he had not had a piece of his writing displayed in primary or secondary school. K stated whilst he liked Maths

and Science, in English he liked comprehension as 'there's not much writing'.

The interview threw up very interesting issues to address, in particular that of handwriting. It chimed with my own feeling at the EMC project day, that I'd never really given much thought to this aspect of writing and that it would be something I would be interested to pursue, not only with K but within the department as a whole.

K has a very negative view of English in all its modes: reading, writing and speaking and listening. He entered Seven Kings on a Level 3, his home language is Urdu, his father is often on business in Pakistan and his mother requires an interpreter at parents' evening, often relying on K's cousin who is in the year above him. This in itself causes issues for K as often his cousin teases him and, as his teacher, I have not been confident that the message I want conveyed to his mother is given accurately. K's father asked for support in getting K off his games console and this lack of engagement with homework remained an issue throughout the academic year.

K, like many other struggling boy writers, manages better when he is on familiar territory. When completing a prospectus for new Year 7 students, for instance, he chose to write about homework, he wrote in his own voice and dialect about the importance of keeping up to date with homework. As with writing his work on Wayne Rooney and *The Pirates of the Caribbean*, when given the opportunity to write about his own experiences in modes with which he is familiar it is possible to get a sense of K's own 'voice'. In his writing (see appendix 1a), K is able to change his language to address his Year 6 reader, using the language he might when using MSN. The more problematic area is when asking K to use a formal register, the register, of course, which is demanded by formal assessment arrangements. Clearly much formal assessment demands achievement in this register, so it is a dilemma as to how much, when and in what ways to move someone like K away from writing in his comfort zone, towards less familiar genres.

A FIRST INTERVENTION

Tackling handwriting head-on

Many of us in the English department were wary about being seen to highlight a skill we felt other teachers often made too much of. However, we became aware during the project that whilst we told out students not to worry about their handwriting, their self esteem was rooted in their presentation and thus repeating it did not matter was not addressing the needs of our students.

We decided after discussing this issue at a departmental meeting to run three sessions focussing on handwriting, as a self-referral 'workshop' for students. Having the project on the agenda of departmental meetings was essential not only in keeping members of the team up to date with the project but as a 'critical friend' and resource. We sought support from the Learning Support Department as we did not have any resources or in truth idea as to how to go about running a handwriting workshop.

To our delight, one boy who attended all the sessions did visibly make significant improvements; he commented that it had changed his attitude to his writing. On a practical note, he felt it was important that we used white boards in the sessions as he could wipe out his errors immediately and thus could present his best work.

When handwriting sessions were offered to Year 7s, however, frustratingly K did not choose to attend. We felt it was important that these sessions were voluntary. In line with K's learning behaviour in the classroom not only does he lack the organisational skills to attend such a session but his lack of maturity about his own learning led him to scoff at the idea that he should attend 'extra' English sessions at lunch time!

Perhaps, on reflection, for K, incorporating work on handwriting for the whole class might have worked better than expecting him to attend a workshop. Doing it for all students might have avoided him feeling that his area of greatest weakness was being highlighted publicly.

A SECOND INTERVENTION

Motivating K

A piece of work K had already completed in English and stated he liked and had received merits for, was his autobiography on Wayne Rooney which he had completed on PowerPoint. He found this 'kind of exciting and fun'.

Surprisingly he did not find the computer work for the biography fun but 'kind of hard' and didn't like that part. I was aware here that I had made an assumption that as K had admitted to being 'hooked' on computer games at home, he would prefer to use a computer. It could be said that this reflects my use of ICT and my lack of awareness of the more challenging possibilities in using ICT. In fact an earlier piece of work on multi-modal texts had not inspired K until he made a connection between the film and *The Simpsons* and had then transposed the names of the *Simpson* characters on to the film's characters.

At the first project day at EMC, we had a 'taste' of a range of different ways of encouraging the writing of poetry, called 'Behind the Door.' Some were very open-ended and offered an element of choice, others used visual approaches (a selection of visual images), others were more scaffolded, using a writing frame. The idea was that we could experience these ourselves and think about the pros and cons of these kinds of approaches. In my case, thinking of K, I was particularly interested in the question of motivation. My partner and I were given a role-play activity as a stimulus for writing a poem and found it very enjoyable. I decided that I would like to try this out with my Year 7 class, to see whether it impacted on K's work.

What happened

K had engaged with the EMC's 'Behind the Door' stimulus, in which students are asked to imagine returning to an old, isolated house in the dark. The task offers the teacher a number of routes into this activity: images; role play; phrases etc. The class worked on a role play, imagining what they could see, hear, and feel. K was able to call on his

knowledge of horror films and games to enable his group to create a poetic response from their piece of drama. Indeed, when I asked K where he had got his ideas from he listed a number of games which he enjoys playing which involve killing characters. I had pushed K and his partner to consider whether their piece was clichéd and whether they could find other similes. They were defiant that they liked the metre and rhyming structure and when the pair performed it to the class, the feedback was positive, especially in response to the line,

Blood was dripping by the litre

which was K's idea. In his self assessment K commented that although he was pleased about the reaction of the class he hated poetry! Perhaps this was K finding it difficult to accept the praise of his peers and struggling to identify himself as a successful learner.

I felt that the activity had worked well in motivating K but didn't really get me any further with my central concern about how to move him forward, to get him to improve the quality of what he was writing and to work in new genres. Poetry was one step away from his usual preferred writing but, despite some success, he came away suggesting that he hadn't liked it.

K's Power Point allowed us to discuss as a class his love of Manchester Utd, in the same way he had talked animatedly about the story he had written in his intervention class based on the film, *Pirates of the Caribbean*.

A THIRD INTERVENTION

Pair drafting

K's concern that he finds it 'hard to think of ideas' did lead him to reflect that he worked better when put with 'someone else who is good at writing'. He clearly came to rely on this. In the course of the project, Michael Simons of EMC came in twice to video K and L working in pairs to draft their writing. As our video evidence demonstrated, his partner did benefit from having K as a talk partner as it enabled her to take the lead role and demonstrate her sophisticated repertoire as a speaker and a listener. Unfortunately, K, however, took on a passive role in discussions and when scribing, so that a wonderful mind map of the pair's ideas that K was asked to keep in his book, contains only a few entries by K. His partner became frustrated with his lack of engagement with the task and thus took over the scribing.

Watching the video made me more aware of what's really going on in such paired writing and made me question whether it is better to have same ability or different ability pairings. Equally it made me wonder whether paired work can act as a 'get-out' for less able writers, allowing them to rely too heavily on the other students.

SUMMING UP MY INTERVENTIONS

K ended the year on a Level 3 and as he is expected to improve by 2 levels over the key stage, it could be said that I had failed to move him on. Motivating K outside of his own interests was difficult and thus the length of his work did not enable him to demonstrate his ability to structure his responses. Despite intervention K's lack of engagement and maturity as a learner had hindered his progress. As he wrote in his final self assessment on his presentation of the nanny in Romeo and Juliet 'I don't care'. His peer assessor, a bright boy in the group commented when responding to the success criteria the class as a whole had agreed on for the final oral assessment,

'What is the point in writing anything. He doesn't care, it's just patronising to pretend!' He refused to write 2 ticks in line with school policy for marking and would only write a wish in each box.

K's final reports from other subjects reflect how his writing is a barrier to his learning and yet the comments are also linked to his engagement as a learner.

History: He has to show more commitment towards his assessed pieces of work in Year 8 to ensure better grades, especially his essay writing technique.

Science: K might concentrate on how he can express his thoughts in a way which is appropriate to science.

CONCLUSION

What I learned from my interventions with K

The project gave me the opportunity to focus closely on K and try out three different approaches: encouraging him to address his handwriting problems; motivating him to write using creative approaches, such as role-play; paired work on drafting.

Unfortunately none of the three seemed to really move him on, though the role-play did seem to engage his interest and enjoyment, even though he found it difficult to acknowledge this.

Intervention both voluntary and formal did not really impact on K's attainment this year. The question remains for me of whether is it because of his difficulty in writing that K has developed low expectations of himself as a learner or whether he has not yet developed the maturity to cope with demands of the curriculum?

Focusing closely on K has led me to the following conclusions:

- That the problems for some students are so complex that one can't necessarily expect quick or easy solutions (and as a teacher shouldn't feel too guilty about change being slow.)
- That maturity may well play a part and that perhaps, for some students, moving from the familiar to the unknown, in terms of genres, may be easier at a later stage. Maybe Year 7 should be a time for building up motivation and confidence as a basis for later work in more formal registers and unfamiliar genres?
- That what happens in paired writing shouldn't be taken for granted. In setting it up, teachers need to think about the issue of same or different ability pairings and be clear that it isn't used by less able students as an avoidance strategy.

CASE STUDY 2 – L

L arrived in Year 7 with a Level 3 in his English KS2 SATs and is on the school's register as 'School Action' meaning that the school is aware that he needs to have intervention to support his learning. Thus L was enrolled on to a paired reading programme which ran 3 times a week for 20 minutes per session. L's ethnicity code is White/Black Caribbean; his parents are supportive and encourage L to achieve. L's auntie is a teacher and is an important role model for him, especially in his reading. His needs are rather different from K's. He has a more positive view of the subject, backing from home and more immediate willingness to participate in class.

On arrival at Seven Kings for the first few days L would fall asleep in my lesson which was the last of the day, sitting by the window in the late summer. L was pleasant, talkative and apologetic about his 'naps'. L was also positive about school, especially secondary school which has 'loads of clubs, loads of things to do and big fields to play on'. He loved reading *Holes* especially when different people were reading the parts and 'made it like their character as it made it a bit different'. L loves everything about English except comprehension; he uses the computer to write emails to his cousins as he likes to have 'a quick response'.

MY INTERVENTIONS

With L, my focus on providing engaging, motivating activities as a prelude to writing did seem to have a positive impact on his views of himself as a writer, his enjoyment of writing and his final achievements.

L, during his final written assignment talked at length about his PowerPoint on Horatio Nelson and was inspired by wanting to know who was on top of the column in Trafalgar Square. He gained a great deal of pride from the comments written by his peer assessor for this piece. He was

aware that his mum encouraged him to write to his cousins and he talked a lot about his aunt who buys him books.

By the end of the autumn term it was clear that L engaged with fiction especially where he could write in role as a character. When responding to *Between Us*, a short film from the British Film Institute, about a lonely young boy who makes friends with a girl in a car in a traffic jam, L was given the target to 'Now add the detail: Why doesn't he have anyone to talk with?' L rewrote the letter into a diary as from the workshop at the English and Media I was reminded to attempt to provide experiences which our young writers could relate to. L was able to talk about his experiences of long journeys as an only child and clearly enjoyed the hot seating activity which provided oral preparation for the task. (See appendix 2.)

Dear, Amanda,

I was very sad The other day because my mum. And dad was rawing a lot.

I am so bored!

in a second draft became:

Dear

Diary,

Today I met this girl called Amanda.

She was very pretty, we played The monster game, it was fun. Her parents were really nice to her I wish they were my parent instead of this lousy bunch.

Here L demonstrates a commitment to his writing and an understanding of the conventions of a diary. His language is lively and engaging but characteristically of a Level 3 writer, it lacks the technical accuracy and structure demanded for a Level 4. In the second half of the autumn term, following on from a drama activity from the NATE

resource pack on *Holes*, L wrote his response for homework. He had burnt the scroll and added tea bag stains, again, demonstrating his commitment to the activity. The language is emotive if clichéd, demonstrating an awareness of the tone of such a letter. Again, the structure and technical inaccuracies hinder the reading; much of the detail from the text, explored in the drama and included in the success criteria is missing.

Later in the term when the class were explicitly exploring how to structure their analysis when reading using Point, Evidence, Analysis as a framework, L's confidence in narrative was evident but he struggled to use quotations even after modelling and shared writing episodes during 3 lessons. Unlike K who struggled to work in a group when writing a Year 6 prospectus, L was eager to complete his paragraph: a post-it which the group arranged into a letter. However, whilst K demonstrated an awareness of his audience, altering the register effectively to ensure the form matched the purpose, L wrote using narrative conventions but gained self esteem from his effective participation in the group whilst K gained little from the experience to boost his identity as a writer.

L's last assignment on *Romeo and Juliet* confirmed a successful year as again the activity demanded empathy rooted in a fiction text, his phrasing again demonstrating his understanding of the narrative genre, 'to let my princess follow her dream', 'I remember her praying with her teddy', 'a cash cow'. This piece also demonstrates L's reading of the film and text and his ability to infer and deduce. Thus his reading has clearly progressed as has his writing but only when focussing on fiction. The assessment of his peer confirmed his success, 'I thought that was the bestest piece of work you have ever done it was clear and well understanding.'

MY CONCLUSIONS

My participation in this project has highlighted for me how broad a level 3 is and how difficult the leap to a level 4 is. L responded to praise and engaged with his learning, progressing in some aspects of his narrative writing, which I believe many teachers would agree is easier for students to access as it does not rely on chronological structure or evidence. L gained the confidence to see himself as a writer. This will provide the foundation for him to go on to explore other genres. Interestingly, in his end of year examinations, L gained a B in drama, C in English and RE and Es in his other subjects where non-fiction dominates. Writing is clearly a complex process in itself but factors such as home life and maturity are hard for teachers to influence, as demonstrated by K. Finally, as demonstrated with both students, literacy across the curriculum is essential at secondary school not only to ensure consistency of practice but to enable students to experience successes on which they can build elsewhere.

My concerns when embarking on this project did not lie in motivating students to write but in finding a balance between the ethos of a writing workshop, which encourages writing per se but also enables students to find their voices whilst also ensuring students' progress as writers by understanding the craft of writing. This is revealed in some of the research on boys and writing which explores 'the over rigid application of any form of intervention' especially where the writer has low self esteem about their own writing.

Having the time and support to study objectively the progress and characteristics of my two writers, what was brought home to me was the preconceived views I held of what good practice is in the teaching of writing. K achieved more when the writing time was focussed and direct, when a response was modelled or directly assessed in a guided session, indeed when intensive intervention was offered. L developed the resilience and confidence to work in groups and write independently in indirect learning time. The

videoing of the interviews and the lessons was at times painful as I saw myself frustrated with my inability to engage K. However, in the debrief, the access to a coach or critical friend turned this despair into targets and issues to be explored. On reflection, perhaps without this input, K may have become a 'ghost' child in the classroom, in the sense that I may have colluded in 'cutting my losses' with K, allowing him to drift further rather than create a foundation on which he will build when he is ready. I believe this remains the perennial problem of the teacher in a class of 30 students.

Such tracking of students, exploration of research and benchmarking of progress over the year, as afforded by my involvement with The English and Media Centre, did not allow this to happen. Furthermore it challenged my attitude and pedagogy within the classroom. At times, I did feel an active observer in the classroom, of the learner and teacher, would have led to intervention at the point of learning which I believe would have been even more effective when focussing on K. Our department have decided to focus on boys' achievement at Key Stage 4 in the next academic year. A year ago we would not have seen the strategies of videoing and analysing the learning as seen in these videos leading to teachers trialling approaches to learning as a SMART, realistic means to monitor and assess students' progress, but of course it is the most effective means in that it centres on the student and the learning in the classroom and as for the teaching it is challenging and progressive, taking teacher and student to a new place.

APPENDICES

~~What~~ **BESTE** playing for Real Madrid for

born Rodney Barn in 26 October 1986 in Liverpool, England, professional player for the Premier League club Manchester United and he played for England international team. He was transferred to Real Madrid. He used to be no. 10 when he was partner with Ronaldo. He was number 9 goal scorer. He wears 5 of jersey.

Really great at supporting them. He joined the Liverpool youth team during his time in school. He scored in the FA Youth Cup. He scored a 1-0 that was his goal. He was a blue during a time. He played 2 seasons for Everton first team before leaving when he left when goal was set which he played for. He returned to Liverpool. Fully a goal based player.

Cliving United was

12/4/07 Strategy Answer

Working in a group - 4.0

Knowledge of the test - 6.2

Amount of evidence - 7.2

4.0	0.2
6.2	1.8
7.2	1.0
	3.0

Score 10.0

Appendix 1a

What is a strategy?

Mon 11 VS Liverpool

In the 40 min game

Backward passing makes it harder to defend

From right half set with the right half with the left half for Liverpool set to a

Control the ball with the left half and the right half with the left half

Had a valley and it was passed with the left half and it went in with a valley

Carling cup final in 2006 beating Liverpool 4-0 scored 2 goals first half with real but most of the game

Are you following the plan?

Appendix 1b

REFLECTIONS ON THE BOYS AND WRITING PROJECT

John Hickman, Freelance Consultant in Redbridge and ex-LEA Advisor, offers his reflections on the key strengths of the ‘Boys and Writing Project’.

The research of the six teachers explored and exposed a range of issues that often float below the surface or simply get taken for granted in the day-to-day workings of an English department:

- The simple act of getting to know individual students better and having a sharper understanding of their background, their motivations and their perceptions is bound to have an impact on the way we engage them in the writing process. This apparently self-evident conclusion is often obscured in many schools where there has been an increasing emphasis on raising the attainment of distinct cohorts of students (level 4 to level 5 at KS3; Grade D to Grade C at GCSE) or on general, data-driven targets (all students improve by 2 levels over a Key Stage) etc. Student interviews and the use of high quality, lesson-based video footage came to be of increasing value as the work progressed.
- The study of a small number of writers can have a significant impact on the way that writing is ‘taught’/encouraged/generated across a range of students and across a range of year groups. All participants in the project have, in some way, reshaped their views on the teaching of writing as their thinking has been challenged by what they were seeing in their own classrooms.
- The complex dynamics around the organisation of paired work became increasingly obvious as teachers experimented with different types of groupings and tried to analyse their impact on both high and low achievers. Problematising the notion of paired activity has helped to open up a range of issues that are often unexplored even in the best departments.
- The advent of the National Strategies has tended to encourage a one-size-fits-all approach to the teaching of writing with the ubiquitous writing frame at the forefront of many school-based initiatives. The project encouraged one or two people to explore what happens when the writer is given time and opportunity to make their own decisions and create their own structures. A radical step in the current climate but carried through with great success by the people involved. It also led to valuable discussions about teacherly interventions in the writing process: when and how do teachers have the most useful impact.
- The last point relates to the importance in one of the studies of a written teacher-student dialogue that generated a great number of extremely valuable insights into the way students think about writing and their ideas about what are the most useful responses from the reader. The discussions that were triggered by these ideas will resonate across all the departments involved as will the considerations about the manageability of this sort of approach.
- Although the physical act of handwriting is often seen as beyond the remit of the English teacher, it was found to be very significant in the eyes of many of the students deemed to be ‘failing’ as writers. This understanding will have an impact on the work of all the teachers involved and, indeed, on their departments as

they begin to look in a new light at the presentational aspects of writing.

Having noted all these points, there are, for me, more fundamental and, perhaps, more wide-ranging implications of this project rooted in the notion of the professionalism and the creativity of the classroom practitioner:

- The project gave six teachers the opportunity (perhaps for the first time) to become the sort of independent, reflective practitioners about whom we hear so much from a variety of people in positions of power.
- The fact that there was time set aside to think, to try out ideas, to discuss, to research, to reflect and to share meant that the teachers involved were encouraged to work outside the agendas of government agencies and away from the demands of LA officials and schools' senior managers.
- Related to the previous point – it was important that this project was set up and nurtured by an experienced, knowledgeable and sympathetic group of educators working at an independent institution with a national reputation for providing exciting and innovative training and materials to teachers across the country. This meant that there was no preconceived agenda and no pressure to conform to contemporary norms.
- The structure of the project meant that high quality training provided the parameters for some unthreatening risk-taking and a forum which facilitated the exploration of new, unrefined thinking
- The fact that the participants had control over their research and had the space to share and sharpen their findings meant that it is much more likely that a developing good practice will find its way into classrooms and into departments.

- Again – following the last point – the departmental meetings at which the findings and the suggestions were shared were a break from the ways in which these sorts of gatherings tend to be organised in the current climate. The focal point of the meetings was pedagogy and the development of good practice; not the usual diet of departmental admin and agendas led by SMT demands. (This situation is exacerbated by the fact that many schools tend to have a meeting schedule which allows for, at most, one departmental meeting each month.) It was also interesting that a number of people in each department expressed an interest in maintaining the momentum of the work by engaging in a similar – if lower-key – project in the near future.

In general I feel that this project will have a distinct and long-lasting impact on the confidence and the pedagogy of its participants and, hence, on the lives of hundreds of secondary students and, indeed, on the practice of the teachers with whom they work over the years. It is the sort of creative enterprise in which all teachers should have the opportunity to participate and it is the key to fulfilling the laudable aims of the 'Every Child Matters' agenda.

BOYS & WRITING – AN OVERVIEW

A. Concerns

1. negative attitudes of boys towards writing
2. lack of motivation
3. identification of themselves as unsuccessful writers
4. widening gap between boys and girls in English national curriculum tests, particularly evident in writing
5. boys' awareness of how they are perceived in the media
6. link between social class and background and underachievement in writing
7. boys who see discussion as a waste of time, sentence structure and punctuation as unnecessary and have no sense of reward from writing
8. lack of research into the most effective forms of teacher intervention into all pupils' writing
9. teachers' own lack of subject knowledge about writing and therefore poor understanding of why/how best particular strategies might be used
10. growing awareness that what have been assumed to be 'boys' issues' are not: more likely to be about how literacy is conceptualised in the curriculum and the assumptions about teaching and assessment which go along with them
11. over-rigid explicit teaching of skills
12. impact of culture of 'laddish masculinity'
13. over-rigid application of any form of intervention (writing frames, modelling, explicit teaching etc) especially where combined with teachers' lack of confidence in implementing these initiatives
14. teachers' negative attitudes towards and low expectations of boys' writing (including being 'alienated by what boys write about' – Myhill)
15. teachers' use of ICT in writing and lack of awareness of the more challenging possibilities available
16. teachers' lack of knowledge about how to teach planning and drafting effectively and how to convey the aims/purpose to pupils
17. gap between pupils' experience of texts outside and inside the classroom (multimodal, non-linear, reader-controlled v. print-based, linear, author-controlled)
18. too great a focus on boys' poor 'secretarial skills'/handwriting, perpetuating boys' perceptions of themselves as poor writers more generally.

B. Recognised as significant or as having an impact on success/ confidence in writing

1. teachers' own subject knowledge and their understanding of why strategies are being used
2. departmental focus on improving teaching and learning
3. developing teaching techniques which are rooted in specific, coherent lesson organisation and centred on pupils' independent learning

4. reading independently, widely and for pleasure as significant as reading texts as models for own writing
5. the creation of an environment which fosters the confidence to take a risk and try new things out (for both pupils and teachers) and where getting things wrong is acceptable
6. effective use of scaffolding – a range of opinions about the role scaffolding plays in supporting writers, with concern that too much scaffolding can hamper the move towards independence; schools that are successful in developing confident and competent writers tend to provide minimum support – i.e. only that which is absolutely necessary – with independence encouraged and expected as soon as possible
7. opportunities to practise and apply independently what they have been learning in a range of contexts
8. regular feedback which is encouraging and constructive
9. beneficial effect of making clear why writing, who for and what (real audiences and purposes)
10. tightly defined task and timescale
11. opportunities to write freely (for example in a writing journal)
12. explicit teaching of how to plan and check work
13. competence in writing skills important in freeing boys to think creatively
14. clear objectives and success criteria
15. discussion and collaboration at every stage of the writing process but particularly to develop the struggling writer's awareness of the needs of their audience
16. organisation of pairs and groups – mixed boy/girl and low/high ability have been shown to have a positive impact on achievement in writing
17. fostering of debate and argument with quality of ideas being seen to matter as much as expression
18. writing frequently and at length – but not simply to prove curriculum coverage
19. judicious use of drafting and re-writing
20. the role ICT can play in motivating, extending range of real purposes and audiences and lessening the burden of text production
21. planning and drafting with purpose and clear aims
22. importance of talk for writing and talk about writing
23. promotion of formal and informal networks which can support boys' literacy learning (reading networks being as important for improving writing as those focused on writing)
24. analysing texts in terms of their purpose and effect, rather than linguistic features
25. moving away from the over rigid application of a generic approach to texts
26. teachers who take risks in their teaching bring more creativity and variety to literacy
27. active learning, particularly drama strategies, not only in preparing to write but also as a tool for teacher intervention at critical stages in the writing

28. teachers focusing their teaching on 'key underpinning ideas':
 - o adaptation to purpose and audience
 - o viewpoint – establishing and maintaining the position of the author, narrator or character
 - o style and rhetorical effect in choice of language
 - o coherence – how text hangs together
 - o cohesion – grouping, developing, connecting ideas and material
 - o variety in sentence structure
 - o clarity in meaning
 - o accuracy in syntax and punctuation
4. some boys have been shown to benefit from tasks being broken up, each stage having its own objectives, success criteria and with opportunities for directed feedback at each stage....
5. ...while others benefit from being given a freer rein
6. motivated by, and enjoy a challenge and an element of competition
7. place a great deal of importance on real purpose and real audience for writing
8. motivated by being involved in the setting of the task
9. motivated by choice of task

C. What has been learned about boys as writers (from research, case studies, analysis of boys' writing, interviews with pupils and teachers etc)

NB: Some of the research seems contradictory, for example regular feedback during the writing process has been discovered to help some struggling writers; others have benefited from greater freedom and a less interventionist approach. As several research projects have concluded, when it comes to supporting low achieving writers there is no single blueprint, template or shortcut.

1. boys focus on generating ideas, not on organising ideas in relation to audience and purpose
2. the stereotypes don't always fit – both in terms of the students and the texts/strategies which might have been assumed to be 'boy-friendly'
3. boys are motivated to write through interactive and engaging activities, particularly those using ICT, drama and visual approaches
10. motivated by being involved in the development of the success criteria for the task
11. benefit from a balance between freedom and constraint (i.e. if the form or genre is prescribed, then boys benefit from the freedom to choose the subject; if the subject matter is to be prescribed, then freedom of form or genre might be given)
12. respond better to both praise and support in one to one conversations
13. boys often have great strengths as writers which have not always been acknowledged: concision, playfulness with language, original/quirky interpretation of a task, diversity of style and approach
14. are often impatient with writing which is seen as time-filling (copying out work into best), for control or to gauge what they have learned
15. need to be encouraged to see themselves as capable of expressing meaning clearly and engaging the reader

16. benefit from a move away from seeing themselves as 'learning to write' to thinking of themselves as 'becoming a writer'
17. associate success in writing with handwriting/output in early years; later accurate grammar and punctuation are seen as the sign of a successful writer
18. concentration spans can be shorter so while boys can relish longer tasks, they benefit from having them broken down into definite stages
19. see successful writing as something to be proud of, remembering these pieces for many years
20. pupils, and perhaps boys in particular, find the transition from talk to writing more problematic than many teachers realise
21. poetry often not as much of a problem as prose – success here can also have a positive impact on boys' perceptions of themselves as writers
22. not helped by a disassociation of taught 'grammar' from contextualised writing
23. frustrated by too much intervention and imposition of teacher language and ideas onto their writing
24. benefit from a 'meta' level of teaching – having the language to discuss their writing, being involved in discussions about their writing and achievement, participating not only in the setting/ selection of tasks but in the evaluation of their effectiveness
25. benefit from having time to 'play' with language and take ownership of it
26. boys' participation improves significantly when the work requires an active response
27. respond well to the freedom, space, ownership etc of writing journals
28. can be motivated to plan through the use of graphic approaches such as mental mapping, diagrams, drawing etc

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Secondary National Strategy: handbook for Assessing Pupils' Progress in English
- English Subject Leader Development Materials Autumn 2007
- Caroline Daly: Literature Search on Improving Boys' Writing
- Professor Debra Myhill and Dr Ros Fisher: 'Informing Practice in Writing'
- Secondary Subject Reports 2000-2001
- Ofsted (2003): Schools where boys write well
- English 2000-2005 A review of inspection evidence
- Anne Turvey in Changing English: Writing and Teaching Writing
- Anna Beattie in Changing English: Exploring the Value of Dialogue in Improving Boys Writing
- National Literacy Trust: What research suggests schools can do to improve boys' writing
- Maggie Croxford on NLS website: making Progress (report on pilot of Progress Units)
- CLPE: Boys and Writing – summary of project
- CLPE: Boys and Writing (2002) edited by Myra Barrs and Sue
- DCFS: Getting back on Track: pupils who make slow progress in English, maths and science at KS3
- KS3 National Strategy (DfES): How to get more pupils from level 3 to level 5 in English part 5
- Progress Units
- Cambridge Faculty of Education research group: Raising Boys' Achievement
- UKLA/PNS: Raising Boys' Achievements in Writing + summary report + dissemination fliers
- Essex Writing Project: Lights, Camera, Action – using a multimodal approach to switching on turned off writers (2007)
- Essex Writing Project: Visually Speaking: using multimedia texts to improve boys' writing (2003)
- Essex Writing Project: Learning Through the Lens
- Essex Writing Project: Promoting Narrative Writing 4-14
- Strategy: Ensuring the achievement of white working-class boys in writing
- Teacher Training Resource Bank – Using Research and Evidence to Improve Teaching and Learning
<http://www.ttrb.ac.uk/viewArticle2.aspx?contentId=13026>
- Raising Boys' Achievement Research Team (university of Cambridge)
<http://www-rba.educ.cam.ac.uk/team.html>
- Initial Teacher Education – English (joint UKLA, Nate and Canterbury Christ Church)
<http://www.ite.org.uk/>
- UK Literacy Association
<http://www.ukla.org/>
- Standards Site
<http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/genderandachievement/>
<http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/research/>