Choosing The Write Book

Journal Article

How to cite:


For guidance on citations see FAQs

© 2015 Primary First
Version: Version of Record
Link(s) to article on publisher’s website:
https://issuu.com/synergyprint/docs/primary_15_issu

Copyright and Moral Rights for the articles on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. For more information on Open Research Online’s data policy on reuse of materials please consult the policies page.

oro.open.ac.uk
Choosing The Write Book...

Liz Chamberlain, Senior Lecturer, Open University

This article outlines the impact of The Write Book, a Year 5 pilot project involving teachers in four different schools across England. The project aimed to improve teachers' practical skills in developing book-based writing projects together with an understanding of how to use a high quality children's text to inspire both reading and writing. The key findings are discussed, alongside the highlighting of the importance of teachers finding just the right book for their pupils.

The Write Book ran from 2013 - 2015 and was a project for Year Five teachers run by Book Trust and funded by the Arts Council. It supported teachers in four primary schools to run whole-of-year-live writing projects inspired by classic or popular children's books, enabling pupils to respond creatively to high quality children's fiction and nonfiction texts. The teachers chose 'The Write Book' for their school: one that they thought would inspire children to enjoy writing. The four schools were located across the country: Southampton, in two London boroughs and in Lancashire. The schools were similar in that they all wanted to develop a creative approach to writing to address pupils' lower-than-expected writing attainment.

CONTENTS

The second part of David Reedy's 2014 Schilby Memorial Lecture edited by Robert Young is published in this issue. The 2015 Memorial lecture given by Professor Peter Blackwood will appear in the summer.

05. Liz Chamberlain reports on a Book Trust project and the significant findings which resulted.
11. Learning about language when stakes are high. The second part of David Reedy's lecture.
17. Amanda Nuttall looks to the future as she reviews Learning (RE) imagined.
   Christopher Jarman
   Rosemary Sassoon
   Kate Gladstone
27. A Premature Obituary by John Coe
29. Cosy Fluker Hunt's Book Page
30. The effects and costs of the phonic check in primary schools. Professor Margaret Clark sums it all up and finds it wanting.
36. Geoffrey Marshall makes a cry from the heart.
Book Trust supported teachers to create engaging writing projects based on the book of their choice. As part of the package of school support, a copy of the chosen book was given to every child in the Year Five classes. In addition, the teachers from across the schools came together on a number of occasions which were called Teacher Inspiration Days to share good practice and work with well-known children's writers to inspire ideas. Teachers then worked together to formulate a plan for the project, ran it in classes and captured their successes and challenges in case studies. Over the two academic years of the project, teachers developed their confidence in using books to inspire children's writing and many of the schools continued to implement long-term reading and writing strategies using books as a focus for writing.

At the first Teacher Inspiration day, the teachers came together and spent the day with children's author Christopher Edge. He introduced a series of writing activities using books as the starting point, including creating prequels, sequels, mashups and film trailers. Christopher and the Book Trust team supported the teachers in choosing ‘The Write Book’ for their first project. Selecting just the right story (or non-fiction title) led to a number of discussions based on the interests of the children, the units being studied in Year Five and the expertise of the teachers, and choosing a book which had a sense of importance and excitement. It was important for the teachers to consider the type of book their children might have enjoyed earlier, or to reflect on books which might surprise and delight them, either because of a quirky, imaginative story, immersive illustration or indeed a high production value. The aim of raising the profile of discussions around texts is reflected in the idea that children's literature can be a natural avenue for encouraging and motivating young writers (Morrow, 2005).

Activities included creating a variety of engaging writing activities including scrapbook journals, newspaper reports, fairy potions, writing inspired by graveyards, poems and scripts for book trailers.

Bookstart, Booktime and Bookbuzz and reflects studies which suggest that children who own books enjoy reading more than those who don’t (Clark & Pouton, 2011). The teachers also liked the idea of knowing that they were creating a library of quality texts to use with future classes.

In terms of project delivery, the schools all took a slightly different approach but were agreed on a similar format for each of the two projects (one in each academic year over the two years). The projects were designed to last several weeks, with the first week an opportunity for the children to immerse themselves in the chosen text. Activities included creating a variety of engaging writing activities including scrapbook journals, newspaper reports, fairy potions, writing inspired by graveyards, poems and scripts for book trailers. Over the following weeks, writing-focused activities were incorporated into literacy lessons, formed the basis of whole days of writing and craft sessions, alongside educational visits and showcase events. The second year’s project often built on the success of the first, as the teachers became more confident at identifying creative writing opportunities. Over the next two Teacher Inspiration days the teachers shared outcomes of their project and their children’s work, shared experience and the opportunity to share good practice was highly rated by the teachers and cited as a key benefit of the project.

The project posed a challenge for teachers, as it required them to draw on their own knowledge of children’s books in order to find a suitable text to use with their classes. When discussing where and how they found books, the teachers stated that it was not always easy to find the time to research more contemporary books and that their own canon of texts was based on books introduced in their initial teacher training, or favourites from childhood. A recommendation from the research, Teachers as Readers (2009), was that initiatives should be introduced to support teachers in extending their reading repertoire, and this was one key aspect addressed by The Write Book.

At the Teacher Inspiration days the teachers enjoyed spending time looking through new and contemporary books, as well as drawing on the expertise of the Book Trust team. The teachers were also introduced to a practical reference source which they were able to add to their ‘school’ learning resources, the Book Trust Bookfinder - www.booktrust.org.uk/books/#/d/books/bookfinder/109,
which is frequently updated to feature the best books for children and young people. The teachers chose a range of texts, both fiction and non-fiction, from both known authors and maybe some less well-known, and included one book from the new Children’s Laureate, Chris Riddell. Having chosen the right book the teachers felt confident in running projects that would support and develop the young writers in their classes. One of the positive outcomes was the expected attainment increase in the children’s writing, with each school’s data reflecting an upward trend for all their pupils. Of particular importance to the teachers was the increase in children’s confidence towards creative writing. In year two of the project, 83 per cent of children said they had enjoyed the creative writing project, and 87 per cent of them thought their creative writing had improved since being involved and, of particular note, 78 per cent of the children said they liked creative writing more as a direct result of the project. At the final Teacher Inspiration Day, the individual stories behind the data were shared, and it was this aspect that brought to life the many benefits of the project. In particular, the teachers commented on the project’s impact on specific groups of learners including pupils with EAT, quiet girls and reluctant writers. The schools had also taken the opportunity to involve the wider community in the promotion of reading and writing for pleasure by inviting parents to end-of-project celebrations and writing workshops.

Such findings are encouraging and exciting following the final Inspiration Day. The Write Book’s evaluation identified eight key findings. These provide a useful starting point to some of the current and key debates for teachers about reading and writing. In particular, there continues to be an on-going concern about primary pupils’ writing attainment (Ofsted, 2009; Fisher, 2006; Ofsted, 2005), together with an annual surveys suggesting children often report that they do not enjoy writing (Clark, 2014). This is often characterised by an apparent reluctance amongst boys to choose writing as something they do for pleasure. The Write Book’s findngs are grouped into eight themes and are discussed below. In particular, they focus on the children’s quality responses to the books, how books can be used as books, and the noted increase in teachers’ confidence in sourcing quality children’s literature.

Children enjoy writing more, and write better, when they’re inspired by a high quality book they’ve loved

Children love having more time to read and write at school

As other studies have shown (Beaune et al, 2010), children want more time to write in school. Alongside their teachers, children often feel under pressure to think of good ideas for writing and to turn those ideas into a final product, all within a one-hour lesson. When the Write Book children were initially asked what they did not enjoy about writing, they reflected the same concerns, I don’t like that we do not get enough time for creative writing.” And ‘The only thing I dislike is sometimes, we are not given enough time for me to put everything I want to in full detail.’ As the project developed, and certainly noted within the second year’s projects, the teachers become more confident in blocking out a morning or an afternoon for the children to write. When the beginning, this was a little intimidating for some, as there was a worry that this might be too much time, teachers soon saw the benefits of children writing for longer. Bower (2011-1) reflects this... when children are given the opportunities to engage more deeply with texts, they can use this power to find a voice, both oral and written.” As always, it is one particular child who provided the greatest insight. The Year Five teacher from Claremont Primary School spoke about the impact having time to write had made on one previously disengaged girl: ‘Knowing that she can write at her own pace over time has given her the confidence and self belief that she is a writer.’

Children enjoy writing when it’s taken beyond the classroom or involves an intriguing event

One of the most popular elements of the previous Everybody Writes project, which in many ways informed the initial planning of The Write Book project, was the idea of a whole school or class event taking place beyond the classroom to provide the stimulus for writing – in the school grounds, in community settings or as part of a school trip. The Write Book projects took inspiration from ideas shared at the first Teacher Inspiration Day, and made plans to take children out of their classrooms. There was a school assembly that took place in the school grounds, a celebration assembly that took place in the school grounds, and an assembly that took place in the school grounds. These assemblies were attended by the local community and were featured in local newspapers.
the case of the doctor. Who character encyclopaedia. The
children's prior knowledge quickly became apparent and
the barriers to writing were lessened for those less likely
to want to write.

Using 'books as hooks' encourages creative learning
and helps embed reading and writing for pleasure
depth into the curriculum

One of the original aims of the project was for teachers
to make links across subjects and to embed reading and
writing throughout the curriculum. For some teachers
this was a pedagogical shift, in that they were able to
begin to see the benefits of using a book as a starting
point for other subjects, e.g., for a science topic on
space. In addition, learning outside the classroom
became a new approach to learning for one school, as
the children's writing around their Coalmine project
and looking at intriguing doors in the community (and
the popular cemetery visit) was so compelling and it led to
a noticeably higher quality in writing than in previous
writing projects. The use of A Midsummer Night's Dream
as a 'Write Book' also allowed children to hear the words
of Shakespeare as intended, by hearing it spoken aloud
through their own performance leading to a celebratory
assembly in the forest.

Whilst the other seven project outcomes led to a discussion
about writing and the pedagogy of writing in primary
classrooms, one of the key findings of the project focused
on the children themselves as developing writers. This
was reflected throughout the project and in the children's
reflections. "If I need an idea I know I can think about the
other books I've read and adapt them", whilst another
child's intention is to, 'read lots of different types of books
picture books and on-paper books - at first they can help
you with your ideas'. This led to the final outcome for both
children and teachers in that, Using high quality books
to inspire and emulate writing encourages children to
think of themselves as writers, which must surely be the
aspirational outcome of any project which hopes to capture
the imaginations and creativity of young writers both
within our classrooms and beyond the classroom walls.

For more details on The Write Book including the project
evaluation and Teachers' toolkit for running your own Write
Book project:

www.booktrust.org.uk/programmes/primary/the-write-book

The toolkit contains links to Book Trust's Book lender, information
on how to arrange a writer visit, fun workshop films from
children's authors Tony Bradman and Sarah McIntyre and six
free and exclusive one hour writers' workshops to run in your
classroom.

Thank you to the schools who took part in the Write Book project
and whose work and responses are shared in the article.
- Heaton Park Primary School in Burnley, Lancashire
- Sandringham Primary School in Newham, London
- Claremont Primary School in Cribbwell, London
- Swanspit Primary School in Southampton, Hampshire

Further reading:
Writing Effectively: Reviewing Practice. London: UKA.
Bowles, V. (2011) 'Enhancing children's writing: Creative ways to teach
enjoyment, attitudes, behaviour and attainment, London: National
Literacy Trust.
National Literacy Trust.
Cremm, T., Bearne, E., Mottam, M. & Goodwin, P. (2009) 'Primary
teachers as readers', English Education, 42 (3), pp.8-23.
Fisher, R. (2006) 'Whose writing is it anyway?', Cambridge Journal of
London: Ofsted.
children read and write (5th ed.). Bosten, Allen & Bacon.
Paquette, K. (2007) 'Encouraging Primary Students' Writing Through

Dr Liz Chamberlain is a Senior Lecturer in the Education
and Language Studies Faculty of the Open University
where she is Head of Qualifications for the Education
Studies (Primary) degree. Liz is a Trustee of the
United Kingdom Literacy Association and Chair of its
International sub-committee.

'Learning about language when stakes are high'

Part one: Focus on Language, Reading Development and Testing - this was published in
the previous edition of Primary First (October, 2015)

Part two: Part two: Focus on Language Development and Knowledge about Grammar
- in the second part of the lecture David Reedy examined productive ways
of approaching the teaching of grammar in the primary years and its contribution
to the development of writing skills.

The Christian Schiller memorial lecture 2014 by David Reedy

Knowledge about language and grammar - beyond labelling.

I am going to start the second area that I want to examine,
grammar knowledge, with another quote from Schiller
(1948). It is about mathematics but you can substitute
grammar and it still makes complete sense.

Young children grow in their power of using number
through experience, doing and living through actual
experiences (using the generalisation of language), and
finally they grow to perceive the idea of relationships
between numbers, and the generalisation of
mathematics. (p.14)

If we substitute grammar it comes out something like
this: Young children grow in their power of using grammar
through experience, doing and living through actual
experiences (using the generalisation of language), and
finally they grow to perceive explicitly the idea of
relationships between words and sentences.

It is by using language in real contexts that children
develop their use of grammatical structures, sentences,
and parts of text which go together to make meaning,
whether in writing or when you're reading. And then
this implicit understanding can be made explicit and help
children to understand what a language user does to make
meaning clear to others.