

# Developing children's learning in the Foundation Stage



**Foundation Stage Writing Project**  
2008-2009

  
**Sunderland**  
City Council

### In Autumn 2008 selected schools in Sunderland were invited to take part in the Foundation Stage Writing Project.

The main aims of the Writing Project were:

- To increase teacher's confidence when planning a range of writing activities for children in Reception.
- To inspire teachers when encouraging children to write, particularly boys.
- To explore the value of Guided Writing as a valuable and appropriate teaching tool within the Early Years.
- To improve levels of attainment in Communication, Language and Literacy Development (CLLD), particularly writing.

#### **So, what did involvement in the Writing Project mean for schools and practitioners?**

- Head teachers and Foundation Stage teachers attended a launch which discussed the main aims of the Writing Project

- Nominated Reception teachers attended a whole days training session, including a half day visit to Trimdon Infant School in Durham to observe and discuss the teaching of writing within the Early Years
- Teachers were provided with reading materials and resource books and an audit of their current writing provision to get them started (see list of useful texts)
- Following the training teachers devised an action plan and selected a target group of children to work with on their chosen area for development
- A drop in session was provided for teachers half way through the project in order for them discuss any issues, or gain some advice, when carrying out their project in school
- At the end of the project teachers were invited to attend a sharing session to celebrate successes, discuss challenges and look for ways to move their practice forward.

## Foundation Stage Writing Project

### What were the main successes of the Writing Project, and things you might try in your setting?

#### Finger gym

Fine motor skills are crucial when attempting to develop children's writing. Some teachers set up a Finger Gym in their settings for children to access as part of their continuous provision.

Resources included tweezers, jigsaws, pegs, sorting toys, bubble wrap, tracing cards and threading beads.



This would be a great area for Nursery children, to develop their fine motor skills as early preparation for writing.

### Planned guided writing

By encouraging children to write in small groups, teachers found children gained confidence in their writing. Large pieces of paper were found to be a useful tool and unthreatening for beginner writers.

Small groups meant discussion came first, which gave the opportunity for the teacher to model the process of writing for different purposes as well as modelling the application of phonics.



Different children will be motivated by different text types. Labels and lists can be more accessible for beginner writers than recounts and stories.

## Talking comes first

Children need a purposeful stimulus for writing, and teachers found that using visits, interests and experiences provided motivation to put pen to paper.

Many of the teachers spent a long time practising oral skills with children, such as storytelling, in order to provide them with the language and confidence they need to become writers.

Story maps were used as another scaffold for children as they re-told stories and events, and once confident they moved on to writing. By engaging children in discussion the teachers were also able to scribe their thoughts, once again modelling the process of writing.



Children need to see writers writing and with modern technology taking over their only chance to see this may be in the classroom.

### All areas should be a 'writing area'

To truly inspire children to write, particularly boys, the teachers found one writing area with a table was not enough. Writing implements should be available throughout the setting inside and out so that children can take part in activity when the mood suits them!



Take time to model the use of new equipment such as clip boards and new stationary.

### Exciting resources can bring writing to life

Teachers found that children were much more excited about writing when they used a felt tipped pen. When a child is learning to control their grip they will have more success making marks with a pen than they will with a pencil, which often requires them to put pressure on the paper. The end product for the child is a bolder more colourful piece of writing, which is obviously more enjoyable to produce.

# Foundation Stage Writing Project

## Some resources that you might like to try:

- Big sheets of paper for collaborative work
- Pens, chalk, markers
- Large and small whiteboards
- Writing tool-kits to be moved from area to area – these are particularly useful outside
- A good news wall, always available for children to write on
- Colour-copied writing frames, using interesting clip art for motivation
- Clipboards
- Post-it notes and stickers
- Hand-made books for children to create their own stories and texts
- Resources linked to child's interests
- Adults spending time writing in the classroom

## Some of the challenges teachers found when implementing the project:

- Finding the time for every child to take part in planned writing activities on a weekly basis, and time for the teacher to support them
- Finding space and a suitable area for writing with a small group
- Finding ways to inform parents, and involve them in their child's writing development
- Providing appropriate activities and support for children at all different stages in their writing development: from basic mark making, to children beginning to apply their phonics skills
- Showing other practitioners the benefits of Guided Writing, and its place within the Foundation Stage Curriculum, through fun and appropriate activities
- Sharing successful strategies with other staff particularly in times of transition i.e. Reception to Year 1
- Encouraging all staff within the Foundation Stage setting to embrace change, new ideas, and show enthusiasm for the project
- Ensuring a consistent phonics programme was used throughout the school e.g. using 'Letters and Sounds' as a tool for learning to read and write

## How the Writing Project benefited the children and teachers involved:

### The children:

- would choose to write more often as their confidence in their own skills increased;
- were more motivated to write as the teacher provided exciting and relevant stimulus and resources;
- were supported through collaborative work, and therefore less pressure was on the individual beginner writer;
- had more opportunities to develop their oral skills and, through teacher modelling, see how this transferred to writing;
- gained more first hand experiences;
- felt that they could write regardless of their stage of development;
- made better than expected progress on the writing scale of the Foundation Stage Profile.

### The teachers:

- developed their skills in providing opportunities for writing;
- made writing come alive through interesting stimulus;
- gained an increased understanding of how to support the different levels of writing development, and identifying the next steps for the children;
- developed an understanding of the importance of Guided Writing in the Foundation Stage, and ideas to use when teaching it;
- shared ideas and successes with other practitioners, building up a bank of resources and strategies for teaching young children to write;
- were motivated by the children's achievements and will continue to use the strategies and knowledge they gained from the writing project throughout the next academic year.



**Texts that you may find helpful:**

**Let's Write – 50 Exciting Starting Points for Writing Experiences**

Ros Bayley and Lynn Broadbent  
(Lawrence Educational Press)

**Literacy Outdoors – 50 Exciting Starting Points for Outdoor Literacy Experiences**

Ros Bayley, Helen Bromley and Lynn Broadbent  
(Lawrence Educational Press 2006)

**Supporting Children's Writing Development in the Early Years**

Sue Day and Ros Bayley  
(Lawrence Educational Press)

**This is the way I learnt to write**

Suzanne and Lucy McEwan  
(Lawrence Educational Press 2003)

**Talk for Writing**

The National Strategies (DCSF)

**Mark Making Matters**

The National Strategies (DCSF)

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