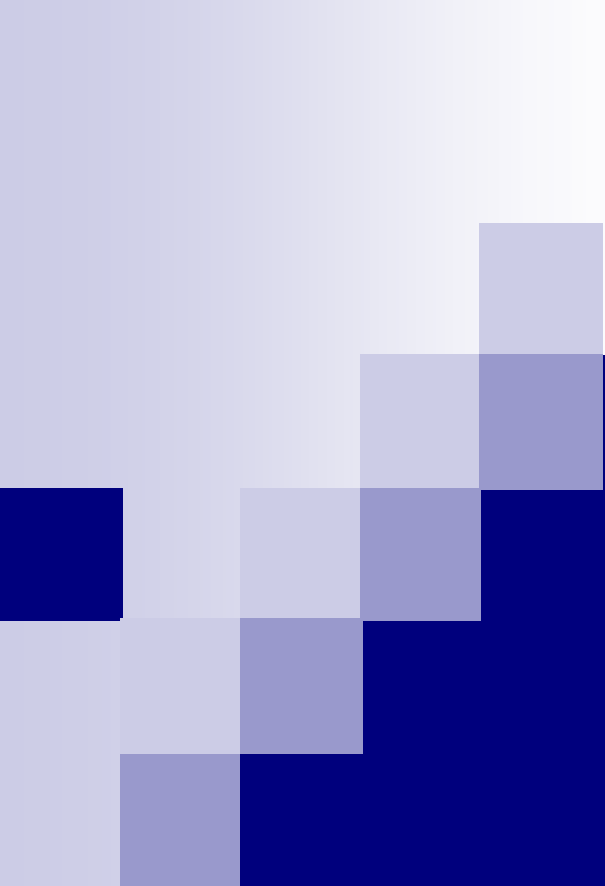


# Writing for real: using the power of experiential learning

Gill Matthews

[www.gillmatthews.co.uk](http://www.gillmatthews.co.uk)



Even if you're on the right track, you'll get run over if you just sit there.

Will Rogers

US humorist and showman

1879 - 1935



# Hypothesis

- Involving pupils, particularly boys, in direct experiences will motivate them to write. When combined with careful teaching, this will improve the quality of their writing and thereby close the gap between reading and writing attainment.



# Intended Outcomes

- Improvements in the quality of writing, particularly among boys, ultimately lifting a critical number of pupils from level 3 into level 4
- More confident use of the Primary Framework to support planning of teaching units
- Improved understanding and use of the planning and teaching model
- Improved use of speaking and listening and role play to extend writing



# Data collection

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



# Some examples:

- the legend of Robin Hood in which children discovered related artefacts in their classroom and went on a visit to a castle and a forest;
- an exploration of Treasure Island with the children working as pirate crews;
- communication with a mystery traveller who needed help on his journey around Canada;
- alien space craft lands on school field;
- the recruitment of children as ghost hunters in a bid to catch a particularly troublesome set of ghosts.



# S.P.O.O.C.S

- KS2 writing SATs revision programme
- Children in role as ghost hunters
- Writing for authentic purposes and audiences
- [www.spooocs.co.uk](http://www.spooocs.co.uk)



# Impact on children

- Early indications of significant improvements in quality and quantity of writing
- Positive changes in attitudes to writing and to themselves as writers
- Pupils are motivated, engaged in, and leading, their own learning

**Child 1 – Sep 08 Level 3c After project 4c**

*One gloomy, dull night the ferry with the most pricey diamond set out. The bright lights coming from the ferry lminated across the gloomy ocean and to the sand. Meanwhile, P.C Pudge was at the station waiting for a phone call.*

**Child 2 – Sep 08 Level 3c After project 5c**

*The wispy fog crept across the silent swamp. The stone castle loomed over the two detectives. The eerie silence was broken by the younger of the two men.*

**Child 3 – Sep 08 Level 3b After project 4a**

*It was a flashing bright morning and Mrs Greengrow was riding her bike around the beautiful grounds at Brocklake hall. “Good Morning!” she called cheerfully to Mary the maid, “I’m looking forward to the dinner party tonight!”*

### **Child 4 – Sep 08 Level 3b After project 3a**

“This is the best work I have ever produced,” said child 4. She also said the best thing about the project was the biscuits at the party!

*Detective Jackson was sitting at his desk with his feet up eating a McDonalds and a large banana milk shake. Suddenly the phone rang and Detective Jackson falls off his chair.*

### **Child 5 – Sep 08 Level 3b After project 4c**

*“What, what’s going on?” Richard said.*

*“Answer the phone!” said Jane angrily.*

*“It was Dr Tinky Winky one of his special diamonds have gone missing,” explained Richard.*

*“Well come on then what are you waiting for?” said Jane.*

### **Child 6 – Sep 08 Level 3b After project 4a**

*It was a lovely, normal day in London. People talking, birds singing, a siren of a police-car chasing a criminal. But that police siren was the siren of...Inspector Virk! Inspector Virk is the kind of officer who would never say no to a job, he has an active body, moreover he is a perfect leader.*



# Impact on teachers

- Greater understanding, and use, of the 3 phase planning model resulting in longer teaching units (4 – 6 weeks)
- Improved subject knowledge, particularly in their depth of understanding of a genre or text type
- Willingness to ‘take risks’ and be more flexible in terms of timing of units and lessons
- Increased enthusiasm and positive attitudes to the impact of experiential learning on writing



# A teacher's perspective

- I have watched my class become very animated.
- Attitudes have become very positive and every lesson has gone by in a flash!
- All of the pupils have been so much more engaged.
- It has been good to see how the children's journals have developed. Their creativity has been amazing and they are all very proud of what they have done.
- Another indicator of their enjoyment of the project is their commitment to completing their writing, something they don't often want to do on a daily basis.
- The variety and range of writing, the links to art and being given the freedom to choose has really inspired lots of children.



# A teacher's perspective

- There are lots of things for me to take forward out of the project, for instance, giving children more choice, having their own journals to respond to texts in their own way. Perhaps the most important ones for me at this point in time is to help children to continue have positive attitudes to the subject so they enjoy it and feel confident. There must be a purpose to the learning so pupils feel fully involved and this can be achieved by more links to other curriculum areas so pupils don't see Literacy in isolation.



# Impact on teaching and learning

- Explicit writing opportunities for authentic audiences and purposes resulting in quality pieces of writing
- Children have something meaningful to write about
- More use of ICT and Speaking & Listening activities, particularly drama
- Teaching is meeting the needs of learners
- Creative cross-curricular links in units leading to meaningful learning
- Shared knowledge and understanding of the ‘big picture’ of what is being learned



# Impact on schools

- Head teachers are involved and supportive
- Stimulating learning environments in the classroom and beyond
- Use of outside agencies *e.g. local artist,*
- Funding needed *e.g. for trips*



# Common elements

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



# The art of writing

- ‘Bad writers allow the words to choose them, rather than the other way round.’ (Orwell)
- ‘Good writers put the right words in the right place in the right order.’ (with apologies to Keats)



# Everybody Writes

- <http://www.everybodywrites.org.uk/projects/case-study-details/giant-eggs/>
- <http://www.everybodywrites.org.uk/projects/case-study-details/the-close-encounters-project/>