

How do I improve my support of learning and learners in my school as Head teacher?

Paul Falkus Understanding learners and learning May 2010

In this essay I want to use a school project designed to improve writing as a starting point to develop my understanding of how we learn. I want to focus on how different approaches used in the project adopted or utilised styles of learning that others have postulated.

Firstly I want to reflect on my motivation in attempting to create a 'perfect world' or enabling environment for children in which learning is natural, enjoyable and lacks significant pressure. I want to explain my understanding of learning and the transforming power that it potentially has in enabling others to enrich their lives and those of others. I will explain how my understanding relates to Maslow's theory of a hierarchy of needs. Secondly I will relate how political pressures affect and change this approach to learning and force the adoption of a more focused and target driven approach to learning. After this I will focus on a particular project undertaken in school to improve aspects of writing and reflect on the various efforts made to engage members of the school community in making the project a priority and to become a 'Community of Practice'.

I intend to relate strategies used to develop one specific aspect of writing to theories about learning before moving on to a much wider and more exciting project designed to help children to become discriminating self critical writers with well developed technical and creative skills. Again I intend to relate this project to theories about learning. I also intend to consider the impact of these projects on teachers and the school community in general and my understanding of learning and how to enable others to learn effectively.

Attempting to create a 'perfect world' for learners

In my first educational enquiry (Falkus, 2010) I began with an autobiographical piece of writing in which I explored an understanding of my personal passions and values. By reflecting on my personal history, experiences, attitudes I realised that one of my strengths is in establishing positive conditions and creating a supportive and stimulating physical space and cultural climate, in other words an attempt to create a 'perfect world' in which children can feel at home, grow as people, develop character, skills and knowledge.

My prime initial focus in headship was to create a beautiful world with rich educational opportunities. I wanted the children to have a safe, enjoyable and happy experience at school and to find learning fascinating. My priority was helping children to care about their work and to always do their best and to become people who had a life long love of learning.

For me learning is a process in which we develop skills and understandings that transform our understanding of the world, of others and of ourselves, that enables us to meet individually developed goals, and obtain personal

dreams. I believe that learning is a key that opens doors and enables us to participate and contribute to the immediate and wider communities that we live within. It is an empowering development that leaves us changed and better able to make a difference with our lives. By supporting others in their learning we potentially change the world. My understanding is that humans are born with an inbuilt desire to learn that can be either encouraged and developed by positive life experiences or restricted and distorted by negative life experiences. In my personal experience school can have both a positive and negative effect on a child's desire to learn. Schools as institutions tended to put me off learning, while a few individual inspiring teachers made me want to learn more.

My instinctive belief was that if one established perfect learning conditions where children felt safe and happy then children would thrive and the magical process described above would happen. This understanding is influenced and supported by Maslow (1954) who suggested that an individual is ready to act upon the growth needs if and only if the deficiency needs are met. If we could create a place where physiological, safety, belongingness and love, and esteem needs were met then children would be ready to develop the need to know, understand and explore as well as aesthetic needs such as an appreciation of symmetry, order, and beauty. In this environment the higher order needs for self actualisation (realizing one's potential) and transcendence (connecting to something beyond the ego or to helping others find self-fulfilment and realize their potential).

Although Maslow's theory was developed over fifty years ago it is still one that finds popular acceptance. It resonates with personal observations and life experience. Since Maslow others such as Nohria, Lawrence, and Wilson (2001) have developed a sociobiology theory of motivation postulating that humans have four basic needs: to acquire objects and experiences; to bond with others in long-term relationships of mutual care and commitment; to learn and make sense of the world and of ourselves; and to defend ourselves, our loved ones, beliefs and resources from harm. The Institute for Management Excellence (2001) suggests there are nine basic human needs: security, adventure, freedom, exchange, power, expansion, acceptance, community, and expression.

My drive and energy were initially spent in trying to create a 'perfect world'; establishing an aesthetically pleasing environment which was equipped with excellent learning and play facilities, superb IT, recruiting excellent teachers and staff, establishing a friendly but orderly ethos, building partnerships, and trying to maintain a rich and exciting curriculum.

A more focused and driven approach to learning

In the second section of the essay I intend to relate how external political pressures encouraged the adoption of a more focused and driven approach to learning. While politicians talk about 'improving schools' the majority actually focus on a narrow definition of learning that is measurable and capable of being number crunched. My understanding of my role as a head was to try and protect the positive approach to learning that had been developed within the school while at the same time doing what was necessary to satisfy political pressures. We were proud of our 'rich curriculum' and the way in which teachers tried to bring learning to life. Our

goal was to continue offering an exciting curriculum and at the same time avoiding becoming a 'SATs factory' with a narrow curriculum in which learning was purely about jumping through hoops. We wanted to achieve 'high standards' without sacrificing quality learning.

There is a hard mechanical efficiency to the standard raising system currently imposed on English schools. The combination of national standards with centrally collected data allows sophisticated comparisons between the attainment and progress of pupils in schools nationally and in similar settings. There is public accountability through the regular inspections by Ofsted, thorough nationally published reports and league tables. School Improvements Partners (SIPs) visit regularly to look over the head's shoulder and publish an annual report to governors on the school leadership and the schools progress and also advise governors on the head's performance targets thereby directly affecting pay. There are very few headteachers who are completely unaffected by this combination of pressures and motivators.

Our 2007 Ofsted inspection was very positive. The inspector was impressed by the school and we were described as being 'Good with Outstanding features'. However the inspector highlighted an issue that we had been working on for years, and attempting to improve: pupils' writing and he singled out handwriting and presentation as being particularly inconsistent. They were.

"Why are we always talking about SATs, why can't we work towards things that are important to us?"

Next I want to use the journey taken to try and improve the situation to critically apply knowledge about learning and learners to my practice. How could we motivate children to want to become excellent writers with high quality handwriting and presentation? Motivation is an internal state or condition (sometimes described as a need, desire, or want) that serves to activate or energize behaviour and give it direction (see Kleinginna and Kleinginna, (1981). Franken (1994) provides an additional component in his definition namely 'the arousal, direction, and persistence of behaviour'. We wanted to create a situation in which all members of the school community were passionately energised to develop strong writing skills.

In a governors' meeting one governor said out of frustration. "Why are we always talking about SATs, why can't we work towards things that are important to us?" This comment stayed with me. I wondered why we couldn't determine our own objectives. Ryan & Deci (2000) suggest that humans have three key needs, although they are not necessarily arranged hierarchically: the need for autonomy, the need for competence, and the need for relatedness. There was a real sense of empowerment in the notion that we could determine and define our strategic goals.

Ryan and Deci's understanding of our needs as humans has influenced my thinking as a headteacher, and I now place much greater weight on creating opportunities for learners to have autonomy, to develop competence and to relate with others. One of our three key targets as a school is to offer pupils more opportunities to choose areas of learning, to allow pupils to make more personal choices. I have begun to realise that a restrictive and teacher directed school environment can destroy children's creativity, independence

and love of learning. I have also accepted the notion that learning can be more effective when learners are working in pairs or teams. The use of 'talk partners' is now central to our approach to learning. The notion that writing 'floats on a sea of talk' (Britton, 1970) is something that strongly influences my thinking, and I would argue that many aspects of learning can be assisted by talking through our understanding with others. As we talk and explain our ideas and knowledge to others we gain a clearer understanding of who we are and what we believe.

If we were to determine our own objectives and success criteria where would we start? English as taught in schools is a combination of reading, writing and speaking and listening. Writing itself is composed of a wide range of different skills and aspects. I thought about handwriting as this was an Ofsted issue and for me highlighted our need to raise writing standards in the school. There is a real ambiguity about this; on one level I wanted to define our own local issues and determine our own path, on another I needed to sort out a problem that had been highlighted by an inspector.

Are technical writing skills worthy of notice by learners? What would Shakespeare say?

Acquiring technical skills is considered by many to be a lower order of learning than creative expression. However my understanding of creativity is that it is frequently build on a foundation of learnt skills and that many of the most creative writers and artists initially learnt their craft through a steady process of absorbing skills while imitating others before becoming able to express their creative genius. Shakespeare's early efforts are derivative and comparatively plodding, while both Van Gogh and Picasso initially painted and drew in a surprisingly traditional manner before developing completely new painterly expressions and languages.

For me the acceptable solution was to involve the staff and children as much as possible in determining both the paths ahead and in particular the motivating factors that would inspire children to want to develop the necessary skills.

Developing the first Milestones. Working with the end in sight!

It struck me that one problem lay in identifying and communicating the steps in a child's progress towards a fluent and attractive handwriting style. Even teachers might struggle to describe the level criteria required to gain a 2a, or 2b or any other grade in any one area, including that of handwriting, and that it was highly unlikely that children or parents could do this. If we could condense the steps and create simple bold objectives that were understood by everyone it could potentially be a useful tool in raising standards.

We worked at identifying and simplifying the steps and developed very clear criteria. It was very interesting to look through the books and begin to agree on what constituted an acceptable standard for a particular handwriting milestone. We were able to select certain pupils writing as examples. These were distributed to pupils, staff and parents, and put on our website. I explained the idea to the children in orienteering terms. 'If you don't know where you are going to it's very hard to get there, if you know what your destination looks like it's much easier to find'. The Milestones are clear steps

that are easily understood and which provide direction markers that we can work towards. (Appendix 1)

I realise now that in setting out the system as described I was following elements of the ARCS Model on Motivational Design (Keller, 1987) and in particular those motivation factors associated with relevance and confidence. The notion of 'Modelling' was key – First of all I was concerned that all staff model the handwriting and presentation expected. Secondly we were attempting to develop confidence through, in particular, providing objectives and prerequisites allowing children to estimate the probability of success by presenting performance requirements and evaluation criteria. We were very focused on ensuring that the learners are aware of performance requirements and evaluative criteria. Keller notes that in order to 'grow the learners' we need to allow for small steps of growth during the learning process. The clear incremental steps provide perfect conditions for this growth.

The crucial importance of modelling was highlighted by Bandura (1973) in his Social Learning Theory, which posits that people learn from one another, via observation, imitation, and modelling. The theory has been described as a bridge between behaviourist and cognitive learning theories because it encompasses attention, memory, and motivation.

Bandura claimed that, "Most human behaviour is learned observationally through modelling: from observing others, one forms an idea of how new behaviours are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action.'

For our system to work effectively it was essential that teachers not only modelled correct letter formation, letter size and high quality presentation but that the learning environment itself was conducive; being neat and ordered. The repetition involved in daily clarifying expectations, and showing examples helped create the conditions considered necessary by Bandura for effective modelling. The learner's attention was caught; and retention was deepened through frequent reminders and motor rehearsal with frequent reproduction of the correct letter formations, while certificates and feedback created a strongly motivating system.

Having identified the end goal we needed to see what our baseline was, and I asked an experienced member of staff whose judgement I respected to work with me on a school handwriting audit. We were able to get data about the number of pupils achieving a certain level in a particular year group or class, and from that were able to measure progress. We also were able to identify certain trends in the school, some letters were consistently weak.

Once a numerical baseline is established it has the potential to be a measuring point against which improvement can be measured. As soon as this information is available the head has to make moral and ethical decisions about what extent to use the information to motivate and even pressurise individual members of staff to improve data. I decided that we would not use this data in that way, as I did not want to taint the system with performance review pressure. The large scale control exerted by the

government with SAT data can be duplicated in a hundred different ways at a local level.

Motivators and demotivators

I believed that we needed to establish a reward system to celebrate pupil's achievement in reaching a new Milestone and the school council discussed this and chose a design. We decided that these should be printed onto card to increase their prestige and emotional value. In an assembly I was able to hand out the first certificates. The children were delighted and remain excited and motivated by them. We were aware that the motivation might not continue if certain children found the new system too challenging.

Cognitive learning theories claim that:

‘In a teaching/learning environment, it is important to assist the learner to develop a self-attribution explanation of effort (internal, control). If the person has an attribution of ability (internal, no control) as soon as the individual experiences some difficulties in the learning process, he or she will decrease appropriate learning behaviour (e.g., I'm not good at this) (Huitt, 2001).

There was a danger that children could be de-motivated if the challenge was too difficult. It was certainly true that the oldest children in the school found the new system difficult. Because they had not grown up with the clear expectations their handwriting tended to be more idiosyncratic and less likely to meet the new expectations. They found it harder to change their script as theirs was more established. In ‘expectancy theory’ (Vroom 1964) noted that the equation between likely success and reward had to measure up to energise motivation. Some Year Six individuals switched off, but the majority were more motivated to improve their handwriting than they had been before the system was introduced.

The value of providing clear feedback

The ARCS Model on Motivational Design (Keller, 1987) highlights the value of providing feedback and supporting internal attributions for success. One early change was to give ‘next step’ information. We realised that giving certificates alone was motivating but giving very clear feedback to children, parents and teachers about what each child had to do to improve would be far more effective. A formal letter was constructed which could be personalised to fit each child's next steps. This was based on a letter developed by our Maths subject leader who was working on a parallel system of mathematical table milestones.

Was it acceptable to use a transmissionist or instructionist model in the project?

The new system created interest but not the radical improvement that I was looking for and some teachers expressed frustration in the slow progress made by certain children. I realised that there was a big difference between the progress different teachers could achieve, and believed that this lay in the extent to which teachers were explicit about their expectations. One teacher asked me to model a lesson in which I focused on raising standards

in handwriting and presentation, and having done that I thought that it would be useful to write down guidelines which other teachers could follow.

Teachers tend to be wary of over using a transmissionist or instructionist model in which the teacher simply 'transmits' information to students preferring a model in which students play a more active role in learning is superior, similar to that promoted by Vygotsky. I believe that a teacher should where possible collaborate with his or her students in order to facilitate deeper understanding. However there are situations in which direct instruction is required with pupils, and possibly also with members of the staff team. For me this was a major step as it involved suggesting that by following a formula a certain level of excellence could be achieved. It also involved a making direct intervention as opposed to background climate setting.

Forcing the issues

I found that I relished the opportunity to lead the project and launched a series of initiatives. Having created and designed a new system opened an inner spring of creativity and I enjoyed problem solving and reaching solutions with others in the team.

I organised various meetings to encourage teachers to focus on this issue and on writing in general. I found that writing a very clear agenda/ briefing paper in advance of the meeting helped me to overcome my reluctance to make comparisons and value judgements about others standards. It forced me to address issues that were uncomfortable. One might assume that heads are naturally bossy people who find it easy to challenge and issue orders. Some heads are very good at this but we aren't all like that and I have found that it has been a question of finding ways around a natural inclination to avoid conflict and prescribing solutions.

The notion of having a written series of clear guidelines was expanded into what we described as 'The Standards Agenda'. This is the '10 commandments' relating to standards within the school which is mentioned at every opportunity. (Appendix 1)

I also used the Performance Management system to maintain the thrust of the project. I recognise that while we all were fully signed up members of a community of practitioners the formalising of performance targets helped focus our thinking and raised the priority of this project.

I also realised that it was important to join up all school systems to work towards the goal in order to get maximum impact. When we did lesson observations we tended to use an Ofsted or LA model. We realised that it would be much more powerful to create our own version so that it reflected our agendas and interest. Again it would enable me to address issues that were of concern to us. (Appendix 2)

We also set up a system of focus meetings in which I could discuss children's progress. Again by having this in writing I was able to ensure that all issues were covered. The focus meetings were supported by a proforma which led the discussion through the new agendas. (Appendix 3)

Having begun to create personalised systems that confronted school issues I was finding opportunities to do this throughout our systems. There was a sense of satisfaction in developing autonomy, competence and relatedness.

Becoming what a Communities of Practice (CoP)

The project was also discussed in Key Stage meetings and I was helped by the strong support of the KS2 leader. Although the actual goal in this case (improving handwriting and presentation) was one that could be described as marginal in that it was a useful technical element in writing but not one that required a high level of creativity the staff were gradually becoming what could be described as a Communities of Practice (CoP) in other words a, 'group of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly.' This notion was originated by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger in 1991 and further elaborated in 1998.

As the staff worked on this area of learning we shared ideas and strategies, determine solutions, and build innovations. There was a growing commitment to the project. Two teachers noted that it took time to warm to the idea of the milestones. We developed a shared repertoire of resources, which included stories, helpful tools, experiences, stories, and ways of handling typical problems. All teachers acknowledge the role they have played in raising standards in the school.

For Wenger learning is central to human identity. A primary focus in his thinking is learning as 'social participation' - that is, an individual as an active participant in the practices of social communities, and in the construction of his or her identity through these communities. The focus on raising standards helped create a shared identity amongst the staff as we engaging in and contributed to the practices of the learning community.

The high level of focus on standards created an intense and more pressured working environment. This affected teachers in a variety of ways. One teacher noted the increase in pressure for both staff and children and was concerned that there would be a narrowing of the curriculum to ensure that standards were met, while another noted that at times handwriting improved at the cost of creativity. However I believed that if we could become an effective Community of Practice we could move on to more interesting developments. If we were deflected from this achievement how could we be confident that any other more worthy improvement would be sustained?

Seeing change

The impact of these actions resulted in a strong overall improvement in expectations and in standards within classes. This was recognised by our internal checks and by the SIP in a regular visit who noted how the Senior Management Team were initiating and leading a change towards a much clearer and more rigorous focus on raising standards and achievement and that the school had a strong sense of direction and was successfully focused on improving learner's achievements.

The current point is that the quality of presentation and handwriting in the school is such that an Ofsted inspector described them as amongst the best that she had seen.

Moving on

However having established the Community of Practice and made a significant impact on a specific and technical area of learning the real battle to raise the quality of writing now began. For me the real challenge is to support children in becoming effective all round writers who write for the love of it and who are self critical and can reflect in a discriminating way about their work.

We set about creating a system of Milestones for Writing as opposed to handwriting. These were linked to the national attainments levels and based on the national Assessing Pupil's Progress (APP) success criteria, but with our own twist. We were aware that the number of separate skills required to become an effective writer able to achieve a good level in writing were so many that it is easy to become dispirited. The English Subject Leader and I thought of the idea of separating the technical and the creative elements of writing and having separate milestones for each area. (Appendix 5)

I spoke to the children and reminded them that Shakespeare was one of the greatest writers that ever lived, but that he would definitely not have been able to get a Level 4 in writing due to his poor handwriting and spelling. This led to an explanation of how we had separated the creative and technical elements of writing so at least Shakespeare would have been able to get a Milestone 4 *or more* for Creativity. I showed them the grid and explained how we were going to ask them to follow the same system that adults used when aiming for certain qualifications of having to provide evidence that they were working towards certain criteria. To establish that a child had mastered a certain skill we would need to see it used three or four times in their normal writing tasks. The children could give the date of the use, and provide a cross reference in the text on that day. When they had mastered all the skill at a certain level we could check their evidence base and see if we felt that there was sufficient evidence to make the award.

The benefit of this system is that the children are encouraged to take control of their own learning. Although the actual success criteria are pre-determined they can work on any chosen area and attempt to build mastery of a self chosen aspect of writing so that they can build a complete arsenal of skills. It encourages self awareness and an ability to critique one's own writing.

Although this system is not completely similar it does mirror some of the characteristics of Problem-Based Learning (PBL) which is an instructional method of hands-on, active learning centred on the investigation and resolution of messy, real-world problems. Because the pupil has to find evidence to demonstrate mastery of a particular skill and can choose from anything that they have previously written or can write a piece simply in order to provide evidence the process is open-ended, and self-directed. Instead of engaging in traditional marking the teacher becomes a facilitator and the student a problem solver. The teachers' role is to guide the learning process and promote an environment of inquiry. Proponents of PBL believe that, as a strategy, it develops critical thinking and creative skills, improves

problem-solving skills and increases motivation helping students learn to transfer knowledge to new situations.

As a head I have a vision of our children becoming technically proficient and highly creative writers who are able to assess their own work independently and in partnership with others, who are keen to develop their writing to a really high level.

In this essay I have used a school project designed to improve writing as a starting point to develop my understanding of how we learn. I have focused on how different approaches used in the project adopted or utilised styles of learning that others have postulated. I have tried to show how a school leader has to try and find a place of creative tension between meeting the demands of political necessity and their personal ideals about learning. I have shown how creating individually developed/selected goals can be empowering and how developing and designing these goals led to a significant personal and school wide creativity as well as improvement in children's writing. I have acknowledged that driving a whole school project can create pressure and will not necessarily gain instant whole hearted support from every member of the community. I have reflected on the fact that making progress in a very specific area can build confidence and create a community of practice in which wider and more exciting goals can then be attempted.

As an artist I am familiar with the sensation of getting lost in enjoyable purposeful creativity and have experienced this while engaged in this project. I acknowledge the privilege of having a role in which it is possible to be fully engaged in the worthwhile task of supporting childrens' learning, while working with a superb and hard working team of professionals who are constantly reflecting on their practice while seeking to create an educational 'perfect world'.

In this essay I have noted how I found it very empowering to develop personal goals rather than using systems designed by others. Dadds and Hart celebrated the importance of methodological inventiveness and posited that 'how practitioners chose to research, and their sense of control over this, could be equally important to their motivation, their sense of identity within the research and their research outcomes.' (Dadds & Hart, p. 166, 2001). This element of substantive choice has been valuable in sustaining the motivation and effectiveness of my research as a practitioner.

The methodology underpinning this study is primarily 'narrative research' in which 'narrative research' is 'understood as a spoken or written text giving an account of an event/action or series of events/actions, chronologically connected' (Czarniawska, 2004, p. 17). It is experience lived by the writer who then analyses afterwards the 'meaning of these experiences' (Pinnegar and Daynes, 2006). Because the narrative also describes a learning journey undertaken by a community of experiences involved a community of Practitioners it is to an extent a phenomenological study. I used a detailed questionnaire to elicit others' views on their understanding of the process we had gone through. In a phenomenological study the inquirer 'would develop a composite description of the essence of the experience for all individuals', (Moustakas, 1994) and while I have referred to the learning experience by

others this element is insufficiently analytical to be a fully developed composite description. I have not used ethnographic research because I have not focused on an entire cultural group.

My methodology contain elements of a grounded theory study in that it is based or grounded in data gained from a participant who experienced the process, (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). however the theory is not an abstract analytic scheme of a process and in fact it is closer to living theory in that it represents an attempt to generate a valid explanation for 'an individual's educational influence in his or her own learning and in the learning of others' in which 'the explanatory principles are the energy flowing values and understandings the individual uses to give meaning and purpose to their life. Whitehead, J. (2008)

I am deeply drawn to the notion of methodological inventiveness (Dadds & Hart, 2001) and to that of 'living theory' and believe that the academic distinctions between different methodologies are more subtle when the primary research is through lived experience and later reflection rather than through a pre-designed study. My narrative as recounted here is one in which the outcomes were not just of academic interest but were ones I felt passionate about and fought very hard to achieve. It is history written and analysed by a participant rather than a historian. It has integrity because it is an authentic expression of embodied knowledge and arose organically from a passionate and thoughtful engagement with real issues that required real answers.

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Supporting material

Ofsted Actions 2007

Inspection report: Bathampton Primary School, 31 January 2007
What the school should do to improve further

- Improve pupils' achievement and standards in writing, especially in spelling and at times, handwriting, to match those in mathematics and science
- Strengthen the consistency of teaching and learning in Years 3 and 4 so that it matches the good practice found in other parts of the school.

Ofsted Report 2010

School leaders, including governors and staff, operate very effectively as a team and, in the last two years, have raised the quality of every aspect of the school. Significant improvement to the way pupils' performance is monitored has led to a detailed and exceptional evaluation of where strengths lie and key areas for development. This has resulted in building on carefully researched strategies that have secured increased progress, especially in writing. These improvements are well established and results so far this year show a continuing increase in achievement in all subjects for all age groups.

The quality of presentation in pupils' written work is exceptionally high.

Appendix 1

Milestones for Handwriting

- Handwriting Milestone One: To write letters consistently using the correct letter formation (Reception/Year One)
- Handwriting Milestone Two: To write on the line consistently using the correct letter formation and letter sizes in both upper and lower case letters with correctly sized ascenders and descenders. Writing to be neat and presentable. (Year Two/Three)
- Handwriting Milestone Three: To write consistently in a neat joined script while meeting the criteria above using a pencil (Year Three/Four)
- Handwriting Milestone Four: To meet the criteria above while using a fountain pen (Year Five/Six)

Appendix 2



Standards agenda 04 March 2009

This must be owned and used by all staff to be effective.

Please use the checklist as a 'reminder to self'.

- Well resourced tidy classrooms with good visual aids (learning prompts), well organised displays and suitable equipment (i.e. sharp pencils/colouring pencils)
- Model school script when ever possible noting age appropriate handwriting next steps (y, g, f s are constant school issues)
- Frequent reminders to the class about standards are required. Assume that it won't be considered important unless mentioned three or four times at least each lesson.
- Offer a good example by a child before independent writing highlighting specific positive attributes
- Use learning objectives and sometimes list of marking criteria
- Give specific standards reminders after approx. 5 minutes of independent writing (praise good examples, warn if below standard)

- Give distance targets (X) if required (essential if child is daydreaming and not focused)
- Give immediate standard warnings (W) with re-doing if required
- Use frequent checking backwards with children talking up their potential
- Use personal best of each text type as exemplar, children not being allowed to go below this standard
- Clear next steps marking
- In plenary show good examples of work achieved. Give instant positive and very specific feedback.
- Set high standards in illustrations, colouring, not allowing doodling in best books
- Provide lines if required, and additional homework if needed (BA)
- Have very high expectations and refuse to accept anything below this

Appendix 3

Example of lesson observation sheet.

Bathampton Primary School

Writing lesson observation sheet 2009 v1

Term:	Date:	Time:	Observer:
Class:	Teacher:	AOT:	
Subject Area:	Learning Intention:		
Structure of lesson			
Purpose:	Comment/ Grade		

Lesson description

Evidence from lesson observations

- a) Clear learning intentions and/or WALT/ evidence of good use of assessment for learning/ lesson well prepared/ helpful visual aids (photos, videos, music, text, use of colour) create engagement and enjoyment/ link to prior work or homework if appropriate

- b) Teachers know and enthuse about their subject/ good pace and timing/ helpful interactions and interventions/ skilful probing questioning/ spark and personality/ praise given when earned/ high expectations evident

- c) Class systems well established / individual, pair and group and W/C activities serve a purpose/ evidence of pupil independence and opportunities for choice/ use of self/ peer assessment/ good use of AOT if available/ good resources for pupils allow lesson to flow/ Use of HW & Writing milestones

- d) Pupils engaged and on task/ good prior learning/ good progress/ pupils understand task/ good differentiation/ pupils with SEN supported/ G&T / warm supportive relationships

- e) Well resourced, engaging, and tidy classroom with good visual aids & 'learning prompts'/ well organised and labelled displays promote high quality work (pupil names clear)/ suitable equipment (i.e. sharp HB & colouring pencils) allow pupils to achieve quality work

- f) Modelling of school script whenever possible with reminders re age appropriate handwriting next steps (y, g, f s are constant school issues)

- g) Clear consistent reminders to the class about standards/ expectations (verbal and/or visual)

- h) Good quality example/s of genre offered before independent writing, and in plenary with specific positive attributes highlighted

Evidence from writing books

- a) High standards overall/ clear learning intentions/WALT/ good range of writing genres/ good frequency of writing in evidence (may also be in topic/ subject books)

- b) Consistent progress from page 1 onwards and use of 'personal best' as standard evident

- c) Specific praise for high quality work with (w) used when children producing below standard writing

- d) Consistent evidence of re-writing when standards are below expectations (section or all)

- e) Good quantity achieved (as appropriate) with use of (x) as distance target when child is producing a minimal amount of writing

- f) Evidence of support given to children with hand control issues (i.e. guidelines)

g) Evidence of clear next step marking/ supportive marking generally

h) School script being modelled in marking and handwriting issues being addressed (g,y,f,s)

i) Clear learning objectives and occasional lists of marking criteria with related marking comments/ evidence of HW/ writing milestones being used / achieved

j) Personal/ imaginative ideas for standard raising that we could adopt as a school community

Appendix 4

Bathampton Primary School Progress Meeting 09-10 Date

Recent Successes in the class

Current issues

Any individuals or specific groups giving cause for concern? Any safeguarding issues?

- Academic
- Motivation
- Behaviour
- Friendships
- Attendance/ punctuality
- Homework

What progress are pupils/ specific groups currently making in... / Any recent SWST scores, APP, other assessments? Are pupils/ specific groups on task to achieve their targets? If not what else needs to be done?

Reading

Writing

Maths

Is anything hindering progress at present?

How are the following going? Any help/ support needed?

- High quality work on display
- Working or WOW Wall
- Good range of resources inc. sharp writing/ coloured pencils
- Range of visual material to support learning
- The standards agenda being followed through in writing books?
(quality issues being addressed quickly)

Review progress in Handwriting/ Tables Milestones. Are pupils on task to achieve age appropriate Milestones? If not what else needs to be done?

Adults other than teachers in class?

Creating opportunities for choice in lesson planning?

Opportunities to use the outdoor environment?

Appendix 5

Bathampton Primary School – Milestones for CREATIVITY in Writing (July 2009)

Assessment Focus			
	1. Write imaginative, interesting and thoughtful texts	5. Vary sentences for clarity purpose and effect	7. Select appropriate and effective vocabulary
Level 1	I can use some interesting words that I have been given	I can write in sentences	I can use some words to do with the topic I am writing about
Level 2	I can use some relevant words that interest or inform the reader about the topic	I can use simple sentences I am starting to join my sentences with and or but I use some different ways of starting sentences	I sometimes chose interesting words
Level 3	I try to write in an interesting way about a topic for example using adjectives to describe nouns I try to keep the same viewpoint	I write in simple sentences. I use connectives like and, but and so	I often chose interesting words
Level 4	I think about interesting the reader with my writing,	I use a variety of sentence types with a	I can use new words that are interesting and

	<p>for example using adjectives and adverbs to describe things in detail</p> <p>I generally keep the same viewpoint</p>	<p>range of connectives like, if, when, because</p> <p>I use a mixture of long and short sentences</p> <p>I use the past and present and future tenses</p>	<p>appropriate to the style of writing</p>
Level 5	<p>I interest the reader by developing my ideas with imaginative details such as similes and metaphors</p> <p>I am able to maintain a consistent viewpoint</p>	<p>I vary the length and structure of my sentence for effect</p> <p>I use a good range of connectives. I can use more than one tense in my writing</p>	<p>I can find and use new words to create special effects in my writing</p>

Bathampton Primary School – Milestones for TECHNICAL ABILITY in Writing (July 2009)

Assessment Focus					
	2. Produce texts which are appropriate to task, reader and purpose	3. Organise and present whole texts effectively, sequencing and structuring information, ideas and events	4. Construct paragraphs and use cohesion within and between paragraphs	5. Vary sentences for clarity, purpose and effect	6. Write with technical accuracy of syntax and punctuation in phrases, clauses and sentences
Level 1	I try to write words that are right for the task	I can set out my writing clearly on the page		I can write in sentences	I sometimes begin sentences with a capital letter and end them with a full stop
Level 2	I sometimes make my writing match the task I try to use the correct style	My writing has a clear beginning Sometimes my writing has an ending I sometimes use time phrases	I am beginning to put my sentences into groups	I can use simple sentences I am starting to join my sentences with and or but I use some different ways of starting sentences	I try to use full stops and capital letters I sometimes use speech marks and exclamation marks, and commas in a list

Level 3	<p>I try to make my writing match the purpose</p> <p>I usually use the correct style</p>	<p>My writing has a clear beginning and ending</p> <p>I can organise my ideas clearly</p>	<p>I try to arrange my sentences in paragraphs</p> <p>I try to link sentences within paragraphs</p> <p>I usually use the correct tense</p>	<p>I write in simple sentences.</p> <p>I use connectives like and, but and so</p>	<p>Most of the time, I use full stops and capital letters correctly</p> <p>I generally use commas, speech marks and exclamation marks correctly</p>
Level 4	<p>My writing usually matches the purpose</p> <p>I usually maintain the appropriate style for the task and write with the reader in mind</p>	<p>I am beginning to organise my writing into paragraphs around a main topic or into a time sequence in a logical way</p>	<p>I usually use topic sentences at the beginning of my paragraphs which are supported by more detail</p> <p>I try to use connectives to link paragraphs</p>	<p>I use a variety of sentence types with a range of connectives like, if, when, because</p> <p>I use a mixture of long and short sentences</p> <p>I use the past and present and future tenses</p>	<p>I use full stops, capital letters, question marks, and speech marks correctly</p> <p>I use commas in lists, and sometimes to mark clauses</p>
Level 5	<p>My writing matches the purpose.</p> <p>I can use and maintain the appropriate style for the task and write with the reader in mind</p>	<p>My writing is clearly structured with my ideas developed within paragraphs</p>	<p>I use topic sentences to introduce my paragraphs, which are supported by some further detail</p> <p>I use a range of connectives to link paragraphs</p>	<p>I vary the length and structure of my sentence for effect</p> <p>I use a wide range of connectives.</p> <p>I can use more than one tense in my writing when appropriate</p>	<p>I use punctuation in my sentences, including commas to mark clauses, brackets, dashes and colons</p> <p>Most of my punctuation is accurate</p>