

1 | RAISING STANDARDS IN WRITING FOR WHITE BRITISH BOYS



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1. | INTRODUCTION

"I like writing about football because I know everything about it" Year 6 pupil (2017).

I am a primary teacher in an inner London school. I decided to go into teaching, after a few years working for a youth development charity. I am currently in my third year teaching year 6, having completed my NQT year in year 4.

There is currently substantial concern over the standards of children's writing in the UK. The national data shows that boys fare worse than girls, pupil premium children under-perform and white British children fall behind their counterparts from other ethnic groups. The school I teach in is a 2-form entry suburban school with a higher than average intake of pupil premium children and a higher than average percentage of children who speak English as an additional language. In this setting, our KS2 data reflects the national picture, with our writing data for 2016 showing that girls out-performed boys, and ethnic minority children out-performed white British children.

As an action researcher and year 6 teacher, I was asked to consider how changes to my pedagogy might impact the school's writing data, with a particular focus on the white British boys in my class. The curriculum demands for Year 6 are particularly rigid, with set writing outcomes prescribed for each half-term, and high accountability structures in place.

This research took place over the course of an academic year from 2016-17 and entailed the introduction of writing journals as a weekly session as well as rethinking my approach to the teaching of 'extended writing' sessions, a key part of the school's writing curriculum.

2. | METHODOLOGY

The educational research community continually recognises the ability of teachers to adapt and respond to the needs of individual learners (Baumfield, 2012). However, the question often asked of teachers is how they can prove that one teaching method is preferable to another. Indeed, teachers themselves wonder, 'What is the data? How do we really know if we're doing anything better?' (Erzberger, 1992, cited in Feldman, 1994, p.4). It is important to both teachers and researchers that all educational research is grounded in systematic and thorough data-collection so that reliable conclusions can be drawn.

For many researchers, 'the principles of objectivity and generalizability are considered the most important criteria' (Boog, 2010, p.10). However, teachers conducting action research run the risk of conducting 'insider' research which is potentially 'completely biased and non-objective' (Feldman, 1994, p.12). Rather than attempting to eliminate subjective elements from a study in order to uphold the principle of objectivity, research undertaken by teachers in fact 'investigates and describes [subjective] factors' (Finch, 2005, p.4). The teacher is not attempting to 'take on the role of the dispassionate outsider [seeking] to find objective truth' (Feldman, 1994, p.12) but is rather influenced by the many external factors of the environment in which the research is completed. Additionally, teachers' research does not necessarily adhere to the principle of generalizability; Finch (2005) even goes so far as to label it 'ungeneralizable' as it is 'discovery-orientated' rather than 'verification-orientated' (p.4).

As well as potentially falling short of the principles of objectivity and generalizability, teachers have also been criticised for undertaking research that is 'lacking in quality' both in terms of methodology and in failing to produce 'sufficient evidence to support findings' (Foster 1999, cited in Lim, 2007, p.5). As the evidence and data produced by action research is often qualitative rather than quantitative, it is tempting to view action research as a 'soft option' (Koshy, 2005, p.21) or even go further to see it as 'not real research', lacking in 'intellectual rigour' (McAtee, 2013, p.5).

However, it is entirely possible to justify the use of action research as a valid and useful tool and to share Somekh's (2006) view that there is 'no distinction in value between the research I was conducting as a teacher and the research that others were conducting based in universities,' (p.86).

In order to undertake action research, the teacher must first fully understand its definition. Some key points to consider are that action research is primarily 'different from other academic research' as it sets out to 'understand and solve educational problems in schools and classrooms' (Lim, 2007, p.1). Thus, action research is site-specific; it must be carried out in a school and in a classroom. It is also not a tool to prove the efficacy of one educational theory or another. Instead the goal of action research is 'simply to understand [...] exactly what is going on' (Johnson, 2005, cited in Lim, 2007, p.4). Action research is therefore not just site-specific but cohort-specific; what is 'going on' in one classroom will be very different from what is going on in another, as the needs and abilities of each class will differ year to year.

Action research additionally offers a different kind of knowledge and truth from that valued by scientific research. Rather than producing 'hard, replicable data', action research is based on a 'dynamic reality' where what is observed in the classroom is perceived and interpreted as 'truth' according to the researcher's 'own perceived realities' (Finch, 2005, p.3). This is in no way 'inferior in status' to quantitative data; the observations and qualitative data collected through action research 'can illuminate human feelings and provide rich insights into actions and their consequences' (Koshy, 2005, p.103). Teachers are constantly using their experiences in their classrooms to generate knowledge (Gay, 2006); they perceive what is happening, read the signals from their classes, adapt their practice, all instinctively, based on the 'knowledge' imparted through experience. However, teachers must be cautious; some 'knowledge' that comes from experience 'has its roots in habit, ritual, precedent, custom, opinion or mere impressions', such as the myth that children are more energetic on

windy days (Carr and Kemmis, 1986, p.42). Action research allows teachers to investigate and examine their experiential knowledge in a critical and robust manner.

Action research involves teachers interpreting their own situations to generate valid knowledge and deeper understanding of site-specific and cohort-specific problems. However, this definition does not give 'carte blanche' (Finch, 2005, p.7) to teachers to change general school policy. Its purpose is for the teacher to better understand and therefore improve a situation, and the project must be planned with rigour, as with any other research. There are several stages that must be observed:

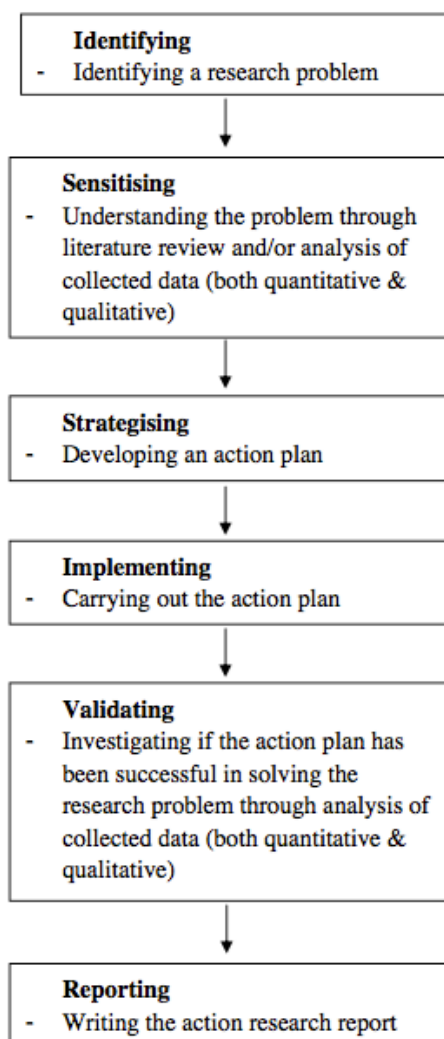


Figure 1 – A balanced model
(Lim, 2009, p.9)

According to Lim's diagram, teachers must identify a specific problem to investigate, and must base their research on existing literature; the academic research provides a rigorous and solid basis for further exploration. The action plan must involve the collection of data to be analysed, and there are many data collection techniques available, including the use of carefully collected field notes, observations, planned interviews and questionnaires.

Finch (2005) importantly notes that 'isolated use of a single research instrument can produce misleading results' (p.7) whereas a triangulation approach to research, where

different research methods are used together, can compensate for the limitations of any one method whilst also exploiting their respective benefits (Shenton, 2004, p.65); teachers must be aware of the research instruments available and be ready to employ them efficiently and effectively in order to bring credibility to their findings.

Having explored the definition of action research, there remains the question of why teachers would choose it as a method of improving pedagogy. Johnson (2005) observes that there is a disconnection between 'the wealth of research related to [...] teaching and learning' (p.44) and the day-to-day practices of teachers. What researchers suggest as best practice and what teachers actually do can often differ. Johnson refers to 'the Moses effect' (p.45) as a possible explanation for this, which resonates with my own experiences; information is handed down to teachers who are expected to implement strategies, without always fully understanding the rationale or basis behind them. Teachers become 'passive receivers' and more frequently, become irritable and frustrated that although they earnestly desire to implement best practice, the strategies suggested do not fit with the 'complexities of teaching' (p.45) or the specific needs of specific pupils in specific environments. Action research offers a powerful tool for overcoming this disconnection, as it allows teachers to use academic research as a starting point, before building upon it to understand exactly what 'best practice' looks like in each individual classroom.

3. | AREA OF CONCERN

Raising standards in writing for white British boys

An analysis of the school's 2016 KS2 SATs data showed that 67% of white British children achieved the age-related expectations (ARE) in writing, compared to 100% of other ethnicity groups. 78% of boys achieved ARE compared to 87% of girls, and 64% of white British Pupil Premium children achieved ARE compared to 90% of BME Pupil Premium children. These trends can be traced through the previous years' data. Pupil premium funding is used as a bench-mark for low-income families, and is allocated based on free school meals. This funding aims to address the gap between disadvantaged children and their peers, as there is a clear link between poverty and academic attainment. In 2011, children receiving free school meals were 'around twice as likely not to meet expected standards in English and maths' as others (Aldridge et al, 2011, p.49). However, pupil premium funding is not always an entirely reliable indicator of poverty; schools rely on each family to apply for free school meals for their child, which means that 'schools only receive pupil premium funding for those pupils if their parents have been pro-active' (Sutton Trust, 2015, p.4).

In my class, I identified seven pupil premium boys, five of whom are white British, and all of whom are under-performing. Three of these boys are on the SEN register, and all of them displayed a reluctance to write, and did not display the required technical features for the end of KS2. Furthermore, their writing lacked a sense of enthusiasm, and passion, and their attention would wander, requiring prompting to stay engaged and on task. During supported sessions, all seven boys showed limited vocabulary and creativity. All had difficulty with handwriting and spelling, another required element for reaching KS2 standards. It seemed clear that these children found all elements of writing challenging; from composition to transcription to editing, writing had become "an arduous challenge" (Dunn and Finley, 2010, p.33) resulting in "the minimum acceptable" (Richmond, 1989, p.82).

Dunn and Finley (2010) summarise the extensive research undertaken which shows that children from lower socio-economic backgrounds often have access to “fewer literacy experiences” and have “less-developed vocabulary” (p.34), which certainly seemed to be true of my children. Teachers are directed to address these issues by presenting a model of literacy which Street (2003) terms an ‘autonomous model’ (p.77). We introduce a literacy curriculum which we believe will enhance cognitive skills, improve economic prospects and produce better citizens, whilst simultaneously ignoring the social and economic conditions which resulted in the perceived deficiency. Cremin et al (2012) suggest that it is not that white working-class children have fewer literacy experiences, but that the literacy experiences that they do have are not being valued by schools and educators. Literacy is not ‘neutral’ (Street, 2003, p.77) but heavily embedded in culture; thus in imposing one type of literacy upon children from diverse cultures, we create the very issue which we then seek to resolve. In dismissing or over-looking certain literacy experiences, teachers are at risk of lowering their expectations of these groups of learners (Cremin et al, 2012). Cremin goes even further in her recent study of boys’ reading; she suggests that teachers’ perceptions of children’s socio-economic class are a ‘significant influencing factor’ in children’s subsequent attainment and can even produce an ‘educational disadvantage’ (Cremin et al, 2017, p. 2). In order to effectively raise the standards of writing in my classroom, I needed to not only ‘provide learning activities’ that reflected the ‘cultural characteristics’ of the target group, but actively ‘take advantage of them’ to enhance their learning (Stringer, 2010, p.5).

Cremin’s research findings were supported by my own initial research. I asked my class to complete a questionnaire to elicit their attitudes and opinions on writing. In response to the question ‘What types of writing do you enjoy doing and what do like writing about?’, the target boys wrote:

‘I like writing not joined up, and sport’

‘letters to important people’(sic.)

‘football because to me it is very interesting’

‘I like doing bubble writing’

‘I like to write about sport’

‘adventures and dinosaurs’ (sic.).

All of them could identify something that they liked writing about, and I saw some evidence of this in their homework books, which suggested that they were possibly not as reluctant to write as I had supposed. In response to the statement ‘writing is boring’, all except one ticked disagree or strongly disagree. Of course, they could well have been responding to what they thought I wanted to hear. However, these children also identified other students in the class that they admired as writers and viewed writing as important for future success in life; this suggested that over-all, their attitude to writing was positive, but they had somehow become ‘dutiful’ in their writing and were settling for the minimum requirements. In response to the question ‘What makes writing difficult?’ they responded:

‘gound [joined] up writing and needing to get spell correct’(sic.)

‘writing things I don’t know about’

‘long sentences’ (sic.)

'joined up handwriting'

'when I don't have any ideas'.

The most interesting response to this question was 'When you have passion your better than writing if you give up' (sic.). It was becoming increasingly clear that this group of children recognised the difficulty of composition and transcription, and saw the need to write with 'passion'. The problem was that meaningful opportunities to write about the topics which interested them were not provided within the curriculum framework. Amongst the rest of the class, I found the same issue; other children said they liked writing recipes, songs, mystery stories, poems, text messages, stuff about dogs, fantasy stories, sci-fi and spooky stories. A high-achieving girl wrote 'I like writing horror storys (sic.) and I wish we write them more often in school'. It was clear that the narrow scope of the curriculum was 'hold[ing] student writing stagnant' (Lamen, 2011, p10) and preventing the majority of students from fully embracing writing. Grainger et al (2005) note that although there is a legal requirement for children to have the opportunity to choose their own form, content, audience and purpose, the constraints of relentless assessment and tightly-prescribed curriculum maps result in this requirement being bypassed. I therefore decided to introduce more ways for my children to choose their topics and text types so that their writing would be meaningful, enjoyable and relevant to their own interests.

4. | DATA TO INFORM THE ACTION

The use of writing journals as an effective tool to improve writing has been the focus of only a small number of research projects. These journals are suggested as a method of allowing children agency and autonomy over their writing. Graham and Johnson (2003) define writing journals as exercise books written in 2-3 times a week for a suggested period of 20-30 minutes per session; children are allowed to choose their seats in the classroom and are encouraged to 'work with friends' (p.6). This releases children from writing done in 'solitary confinement' (Richmond, 1989, p.82) and allows them to see themselves as 'writers in a community of fellow writers' (Graham and Johnson, 2003, p.6). Children choose 'what to write' and teachers 'do not respond with written comments' (Graham and Johnson, 2003, p.6).

The findings from Graham and Johnson's research is encouraging. Graham, in a separate summary of the 2003 research, notes that children were enthusiastic in their response to writing journals, using them to 'explore their own worlds and their own imagined worlds,' (Graham, 2003, p.42). In addition, giving children freedom to choose 'enabled them to develop confidence and verve in their writing,' (Graham, 2003, p.39). When questioned, the children were 'passionate' (Graham, 2003, p.40) about their commitment to writing journals. Lambirth and Gooch (2006) support writing journals as a tool to engage reluctant writers. They note that in order for children to be motivated, they need 'choice of content, genre and audience, [...and] freedom to use cultural connections,' (p.146). Similarly, Jones and East (2010) suggest that 'meaningful writing experiences' and the engagement of 'children's interests' (p.113) are essential to children's success as writers and likewise recommend journals as a vehicle to support writing.

Writing journals not only engage and enthuse children, but provide a valuable link between their different literacy experiences. As children begin to write with freedom, their literacy

experiences outside school begin to acquire meaning and validation. Street (2003) suggests that it is a 'great waste' for children to be unable to 'utilize the experiences [...] outside of the school' (p.83) in any meaningful way inside the school environment, and writing journals seem to provide a vehicle whereby those rich and deep sources of outside experiences are harnessed rather than wasted. Children write about 'the worlds of home and family, school friends and about music, television, films, magazines, radio, internet and video' (Graham and Jones, 2003, p.7) and the voice, passions and enthusiasms of the child are recognised and encouraged. Graham concludes that children use their writing journals to explore 'the worlds of home and school' and make 'a bridge between the two cultures' (Graham, 2003, p.42). Similarly, Lambirth and Gooch (2006) refer to children writing 'from the inside out', suggesting that although children can be coerced into writing, in order for them to be engaged and interested, they need to write 'from what they know, have experienced or are deeply interested in,' (p.147).

A pertinent follow-up question is posed by Lambirth and Gooch (2006), which corresponds to my earlier references to the 'Moses effect'. It is clear that children write well when they have 'choice, intention, form, time and audience [...] within their control' (p.148). Yet policies and writing strategies are often 'constructed, enforced by inspectors, tested against national standards' (p.148) and eventually handed down to teachers, removing the element of choice from both practitioners and students. Why, when choice over content and text type seems to be an effective teaching tool, is choice so often removed? And why, when writing journals seem to provide such an effective vehicle for choice, are they 'confined to the margins of school writing experience' forming only a 'brief, low status' (p.148) activity?

Ethics

Before conducting any research, I ensured that potential ethical issues had been considered and appropriate action taken. I firstly gained the consent of my head-teacher to undertake the research and I discussed my research with parents who attended parents' evening. I also completed an ethics form and received approval from Greenwich University to undertake my research. I made my intentions clear to the class, including 'why their participation is necessary, how it will be used and how and to whom it will be reported' in line with BERA ethical guidelines (2011). I found that there was a tension between my role as teacher and my role as researcher. My role as teacher required that children participate in literacy lessons, but my role as researcher dictated that I 'must recognize the right of any participant to withdraw from the research for any or no reason, and at any time' (BERA ethical guidelines, 2011, p.6). I overcame this tension by making it clear to the children that they were not required to answer any questions, either as part of questionnaires or discussions, and they were not required to participate in writing journal sessions. I also informed the class about how their information would be used and made them aware that everything they said or wrote would remain anonymous and confidential.

Further to this, I considered the questions posed by Zeni (1998), concerning my position of authority in the classroom. How would I demonstrate mutual respect, especially when the research task was focusing on children from a specific socio-economic background? How could I avoid drawing unwanted and unwelcome attention to this group? What precautions did I need to take to protect the participants? I decided against selecting children to work in a focus group with me, and I included the whole class in all parts of the research, thereby circumnavigating the issue of focusing on one particular group. This allowed all children to

feel that their contributions were valued and important, and it also allowed all children to participate at a level with which they felt comfortable; there was no pressure put on any group to respond and the option to withdraw from the research remained open to all.

I also adhered to BERA guidelines in regards to confidentiality and privacy, by ensuring that the information gathered was not shared in a way that could lead to the identity of any participants being disclosed; I kept all recordings in a password protected area, and ensured that no names were used in the recordings. In this way, all participants retained their right to remain anonymous.

5. | ACTION

I introduced writing journals to my class following the suggestions of Graham and Johnson (2003); each session was about 40 minutes, with 10 minutes for introducing the task and discussion, and 30 minutes for writing. The constraints of the Year 6 curriculum left time for only one session a week, despite suggestions that writing journals should be given two or three sessions a week. This resonates with earlier reflections that writing journals are often consigned to the 'margins' of timetables. In a SATs year group, there was the need to produce writing that could be used for assessment purposes, as well as a requirement to adhere to our curriculum map and produce the pre-determined writing outcomes. We were therefore unable to give writing journals time during literacy sessions, and used an afternoon session instead. If given more time, I may have been able to gather further data and information on the efficacy of journals as a tool to improve writing.

The writing journals were not marked or looked at by an adult. However, we agreed upon some 'writing journal rules', which included being allowed to draw and illustrate once at least half a side of writing had been completed and keeping noise levels moderately low, but not working in silence. Children could choose where they sat for these sessions. The children also suggested keeping the journals neat, by which they meant avoiding scribbling and maintaining a clean front cover. Later on in the year, we covered the front covers of the books with collages of pictures from comics and magazines, and we also discussed that the work completed in the journals did not have to be 'presentation' quality.

6. | EVALUATION OF THE ACTION

To evaluate the effectiveness of the lessons, I decided to conduct observations of the class, choosing the role of a non-participant observer (Cohen et al, 2011). As all children were able to work independently, I was free to observe children's body-language, facial expressions and conversations without being distracted by working closely with a group, a potential difficulty noted by Koshy (2005). My existing relationship with my class ensured that I was able to observe with 'sensitivity' and in an 'unobtrusive' manner (Koshy, 2005, p.116) as the children were used to my on-going observation and assessment of them during other lessons. I made brief 'field notes' which I was later able to analyse more fully. A possible disadvantage was that I would miss important or significant moments, or record only what I deemed to be significant, thus introducing an element of bias into my research. I over-came this by asking my teaching assistant to also make field-notes which I later compared with my own.

Additionally, I conducted informal interviews with some of the children, choosing open-ended 'prompt'-style questions such as 'Why did you choose this text-type?' and 'How did you feel when you were writing this?'. These questions allowed children to consider their thought-processes and emotions, and limited the extent to which they could give the socially desirable response (Cohen et al, 2011). Finally, I sought permission from students to take photographs of their writing, as this provided a rich source of data within a reasonable time-frame, minimizing the impact of my research on the 'normal work-load' of the class (BERA ethical guidelines, 2011, p.7).

At the beginning of each writing journal session, I gave the class a stimulus which we discussed before they started writing, and we generated ideas for compatible text types. I asked the children to decide on their text type, audience and purpose and record this at the top of the page. As they did this, I reminded them that they could write for themselves and that the writing didn't need to have a purpose beyond 'having fun'. I attempted to choose stimuli that reflected the interests from the initial questionnaires; these included the dinosaur clip from Disney's *Fantasia*, a page from the book *Until I Met Dudley* and images from the books *Flotsam* and *Tuesday*.

At the end of the first session, one of the boys in my focus group came to the front of the classroom to show me his work. This was surprising, as the student had recently been diagnosed as autistic and is selectively mute. This student fitted the description of a child who 'wrote dutifully [...] not from choice' (Graham, 2003, p.39), (a non-chronological report on the Shang Dynasty, our history topic,) demonstrates this well. This student had not shown any previous engagement with any of the writing tasks set, but I had recently discovered that he loved dinosaurs. The second piece of writing shows his two-and-a-bit page adventure story, drawing on his knowledge and passion. Although the writing lacks punctuation and is told in the present tense, the excitement and drama of the story is clear, and the student's desire to share his writing was unprecedented.

During a discussion with two of my focus boys, both commented on how their writing journals had allowed them to write about topics they found interesting, using text-types with which they felt comfortable. One boy commented,

'I enjoyed writing my instructions because you know that it is not real, but it could happen and it is really funny.'

The other responded,

'I liked writing my horror story because I made it a gruesome one.'

Their relish and enjoyment of the tasks can be clearly seen in their comments and their autonomy over their writing clearly allowed these boys to engage more fully in the task.

The writing journal sessions also allowed children to write free from the constraints of having to join their hand-writing and spell correctly. Several children chose to design posters in their journals, allowing them to engage with writing on their own terms, using bubble-writing and illustrations to facilitate their engagement. One focus-group boy commented,

'I prefer posters because you can do pictures as well as a lot of writing.'

This child was willing to write, but found it an arduous and challenging task. Giving him choice over the presentation of his writing freed him from the struggles posed by his diagnosis of dyslexia, and allowed him to write confidently and with enthusiasm.

Whilst pursuing writing journal sessions, I noticed that the writing tasks I was setting for homework were producing some excellent outcomes, both in terms of composition and the inclusion of technical features. This was particularly apparent after asking children to write a non-chronological report. One child wrote about her country of origin, which was a fascinating and unprecedented insight into her life outside school. The issue for me as a teacher was that my focus group children often did not hand in their homework books. I decided to take the element of choice from our writing journal sessions and introduce it to our independent writing sessions, which formed a compulsory part of the weekly time-table. I initially repeated the homework task and asked the class to write a non-chronological report on a topic of their choice. We started by using one literacy session to research and plan and then took another session to write, and finally used a session to share, edit and improve. The 'dutiful' writing of a critical film review was the outcome of a three-week unit and extensive teacher-input and modelling, contrasted with the non-chronological report on rugby produced by one of my focus group boys. Although his report on rugby doesn't feature many of the 'tick-box' requirements, it demonstrates enthusiasm, passion, a clear structure and a willingness to go back and edit his work with a partner. Rather than the editing process becoming a 'strenuous task' during which the interest of the student wanes (Dunn, 2010, p.33), the engagement with the subject matter carried this student through to enable him to improve upon his first draft.

As well as promoting engagement and enjoyment, choice over subject matter appeared to allow children in the class to overcome the issues of sentence structure syntax. There is a contrast between two pieces of writing from one of the focus children. The first is an extract from a subverted fairy-tale, which was the outcome of a half-term's worth of teaching. The task involved the children transposing a well-known fairy-tale into a Chinese setting, using the class text *The Dragon Keeper* as well as their own research as inspiration. The student is clearly attempting to reproduce the story of Cinderella, but is resorting to a 'stream of consciousness' style of writing to record all of his ideas, and the impression is that he is overwhelmed by the task. The second piece of writing was produced in one writing session and is based on the children being asked to imagine that they are about to do something exciting but challenging and to record their thoughts and feelings. Both tasks involved discussion and teacher modelling, but the second writing sample clearly shows a writer in control and writing about a known, familiar and easy-to-imagine topic. This student's choice of content allowed him to write about he knew and what he was inspired by and he consequently writes with clarity and structure.

It seems obvious that children will produce better writing outcomes when they are familiar and comfortable with a topic, and my class reflected this in their comments when I asked them to reflect on their writing. When asked 'Is there a piece of writing you enjoyed doing? Explain why you enjoyed it', one boy responded, 'The piece of writing based on any famous person. I chose someone I already knew about'. Another wrote, 'It is easier to write when I choose the topic'. These attitudes were not restricted to my focus group children but were reflected across the class; the most powerful comment was from a girl who said in an informal discussion, 'When we [write about] a topic that we don't like, it is torture'.

7. | CONCLUSION

Whilst giving children choice over the content and text-type of their writing does not in itself produce 'assessment-standard' writing, it seems clear that it is an excellent starting point. The writing which includes an element of choice arguably demonstrates more enthusiasm, verve and creativity than that which is prescribed by an inflexible curriculum. By handing a certain level of autonomy back to students, I recaptured the 'source of power' in their writing and restored the 'driving force' (Graves, 1983, p.244) which had previously been significantly absent. Carefully chosen writing tasks which allow children scope to write about themselves, their interests and their passions will certainly form an integral part of my pedagogy in the future.

Through an action research methodology, I have probed and questioned the problematic issue of a performance gap in writing between white British boys and their peers. Within my own educational context, it seems clear that white British boys are at a disadvantage when it comes to the teaching of writing; the topics which they are required to write about hold little interest or relevance for them, and at best produce 'dutiful' writing and at worst result in the data gap which prompted this research project. One child commented that having the freedom to choose the topic of the writing is 'kind of weird because normally the teachers tell us what to do'. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) contend that the culture communicated by the school implicitly endorses and elevates the culture of some socio-economic classes, whilst invalidating and excluding the culture of others. In prescribing the topics of study without involving either practitioners or students, we are constructing false notions of what constitutes 'valid' literacy experiences and consigning major parts of children's home-lives and cultures to the 'margins' of education. We are then left asking the question, how can we motivate children to write? The answer would appear to be to deconstruct the barriers between school literacy and home literacy, something which this project has only begun to investigate on a very small scale, but which could very well form the basis for further research in future.

8. | REFERENCES

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