

Setting Up Personal Writing Project Books In KS1

Marcela Vasques

@marcelavb3

Background:

I work as a Year Two class teacher at Richard Alibon Primary School which is located in a deprived area in the borough of Barking and Dagenham.

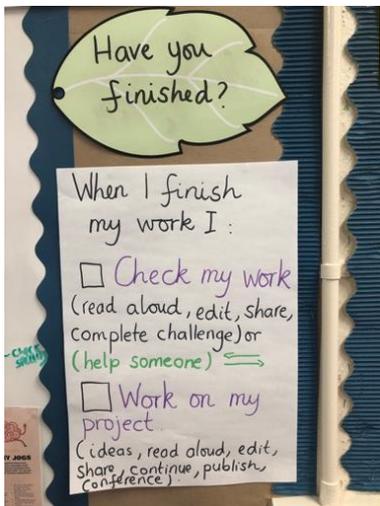
Principle(s) in focus:

- Pursue personal writing projects

Aims:

- To encourage and allow the children to find their own voice as writers.
- To develop children's motivation, self-efficacy and self-regulation.

Description:



After establishing a routine of conferences with my class and the daily use of personal projects books, I was amazed at how much the children had to offer and how they cherished their own personal writing. The richness of exchanges and discoveries between the children and I through conferences and sharing the personal project books made it clear that those children deserved more. Their voices had to be heard!

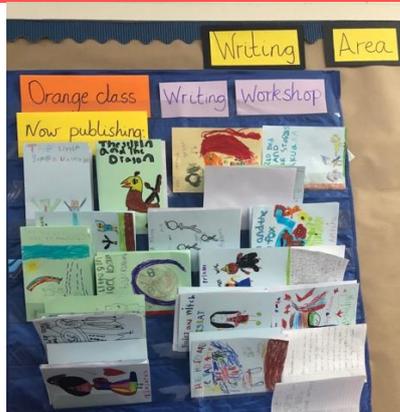
“Children teach us through the information they share about subjects they know....Teachers can't afford to be without the energy-giving power of children's knowledge.”

- Donald Graves (Writing: Teachers and Children at Work)

Start with yourself – I started the year sharing my own personal project book with the children. I shared pictures of things from my life and some of the poems I wrote. Then, I gave the children their own project books and invited them to share the things they did (if they wanted to) or something about themselves. This helped to establish a channel of communication and made my presence less authoritarian.

Explore memoirs – I shared with the children a memory basket as suggested by Jacobson in *‘No More, I'm done!’*. As I did this, the children wanted to share more about themselves. In my basket I had; my favourite book as a child, picture of me as a child, toys I liked to play with and the nursery rhymes I used to sing.

Share – It was important that the children had opportunity to share their own work with me, the class, and other classes too. This increased the motivation and in all children. I also allowed the children to publish their work from their own project books if they thought they were ready.



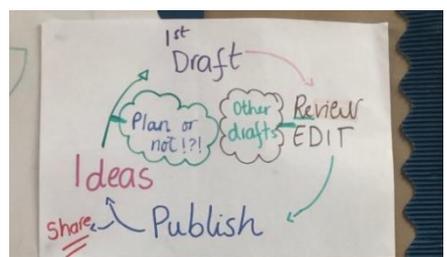
Some of this published writing came from their project books. Children taking a germ of an idea and seeing it all the way through to publication on their own!



The books were differentiated, some had only lines, some half lines, some only blank pages.



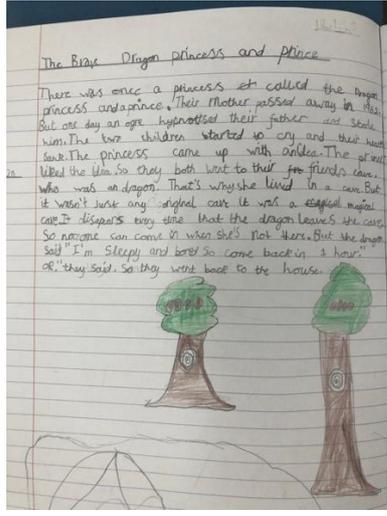
My memory basket



I shared this very simple diagram, so the children started to understand the writing processes independently.

Establish a routine – It was important that the children had a routine and knew when to use their project books, just giving it to them and hoping they will use it would not be sufficient, especially for children in KS1. We needed to set up routines. This year, the use of personal project books improved because they know that when they arrive at school they get their own project books and write. They independently use a date stamp before they start writing each day. I conduct conferences while they write, sometimes I write alongside them. Our TA takes the register as they arrive and also conducts conferences when it is possible. No time is wasted!

Impact:



- **Trust** between the children and I developed as a result of sharing their personal projects books and memoirs. They knew they would be heard and had agency over what to write. They knew their ideas/ stories/ thoughts/ lives were valued.
 - As a result, they wanted to write (**motivation and writing for pleasure**)
- "I didn't like to write before now I do." said K.*
- Establishing a routine of sharing with the class, other classes, peers was very important for their **motivation to write**. They had an expectation of a **reaction and a response**.
- "I really like to write because you get to know more about my stories," said C.
Teacher: "Who gets to know about your stories?" "My audience." replied C.*
- Personal projects books helped the children know what to do and how to do it when writing. It **encouraged self-regulation in the classroom** for all stages of learning & levels.
 - Children developed and increased their **stamina for writing**.
 - **Parents/ Carers valued** the children's writing from **their personal projects** and this helped to establish a deeper connection with parents/ carers:
- "It's so lovely to see that A could write about Kelsey, our dog that died this year, thank you, Ms Vasques!" "Can I have a copy of his writing about his cousin in Australia, please? We loved it!" said H.'s parents.*

Reflection:

- **Next steps** I want to ensure that children recognise the principles of WfP in their relationship with writing. Pointing out their motivation, self-regulation, volition, ensuring (and understanding) they have agency.
- At the start of the year, the children offered small snap shots about themselves and their lives. They would start a new piece of writing almost every day, however; this is developing, they are now able to continue their projects from where they have stopped and explore more their ideas.
- **Drawing** is really **important for early writers**, some of their most interesting writing came from their drawings. It was essential to give these children time to discuss their drawings and their ideas. It has certainly increased their **volition and self-efficacy**. It helped the children to **write for pleasure**.

References:

- Graves, D. (1983) *Writing: Teachers and Children at work* New Hampshire: Heinemann
- Jacobson, J. (2010) *No More. "I'm done!" Fostering Independent Writers in the Primary Grades* Portland: Stenhouse Publishers
- Young, R. (2019) *A Writing for pleasure Manifesto*. [Available Online: www.writing4pleasure.com]