

## IDEAS IN PRACTICE 3

Based on a multimodal action research project *Boys and Writing* undertaken in Nottinghamshire from September 2007 to July 2008, this professional development booklet provides details of how to develop literacy and cross curricular teaching units through multimodal principles of learning and teaching. The materials can be used by teachers, literacy subject leaders working with the staff of their school, local authority consultants and ITE lecturers who wish to develop their student teachers' knowledge of teaching multimodal texts.

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# UKLA

The United Kingdom Literacy Association

## *'I know what to write now!'* **Engaging Boys (and Girls) through a Multimodal Approach**

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Using and creating audio - downloading sounds, audio networks, <i>Audacity</i> , <i>Black Cat Compose</i> , <i>Compose World Junior</i>	

### Nottinghamshire LA Primary ICT Framework: Exchanging and Sharing Communication

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<i>Sound</i> : creating and manipulating sounds	Word file

## Case Studies

### Foundation Stage

#### Case Study One

**Teaching and Learning Sequence** .pdf

**Examples of children's work**

Talking postcards .avi file

### Year 1

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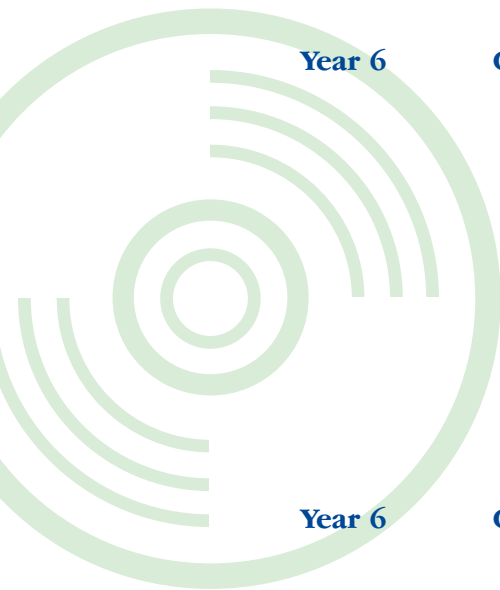
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## Introduction and background

This booklet is the result of an action research project *Boys and Writing* carried out in Nottinghamshire to address issues about boys' attainment in writing. However, it is important to acknowledge that the project also involved girls and saw an increase in their attainment too. The project specifically aimed to use a multimodal approach with multimodal outcomes. This booklet is not a research report, but offers examples of successful literacy units of work which proved to engage boys (and girls) highlighting successful teaching and learning through innovative classroom practice. The work is presented through a series of case studies, each focusing on a particular type of multimodal outcome. There are teaching sequences, helpful tips and examples of resources. The CDROM shows some of the films, PowerPoint™ presentations and formats used by the teachers.

### Why multimodality?

The dominant model of teaching writing has been through print-based experiences and static words on a page. The approach of the *Boys and Writing* project lay chiefly in recognising the changes to writing over recent years. Kress (1997, 2003) has highlighted how developing technologies and wider digital experiences cannot be ignored today and should play a more central part of literacy curricula. Texts now draw more overtly on visual means of communication and so knowledge of visual design and display is also required (Kress, 2003, Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006). Many of the texts children enjoy and experience at home are multimodal, combining the modes of print and image, sound and gesture/movement (Bearne, 2005; Bearne and Wolstencroft, 2007). Previous research in literacy (Essex Writing Project, 2003; UKLA/PNS, 2004) has shown that children, particularly perhaps boys, respond enthusiastically to projects which involve the visual - on screen, on paper and in action as drama. Similarly, motivation can rise if children are encouraged to pay attention to sound, including speaking and listening and music. Greater attention has also recently been given to physical movement and gesture - body language - as part of a wider creative curriculum. In addition, digital technology, more often referred to as ICT, is now seen as central to learning. Generally, it seems clear that if teaching takes a fully multimodal approach, literacy standards can rise noticeably (UKLA/PNS, 2004; Warrington and Younger, 2006).

The year-long *Boys and Writing* project aimed to stimulate teaching and learning by increasing engagement with a wider range of texts using a multimodal approach. It challenged schools to rethink definitions of literacy and embed multimodality into their classroom practice in line with children's experiences shaped by a new media age (Kress, 2003). The project was structured to support teachers as they moved away from a more conventional view of literacy. The framework informing the work derives from Bearne and Wolstencroft's (2007) *Visual Approaches to Teaching Writing* and the project used the planning tool suggested by them.

### The 'problem' of boys

It has been widely reported that many boys lack interest and motivation in writing and reading for pleasure (Warrington and Younger, 2006). Government results show a continued gap in attainment between boys' and girls' reading and writing; national results support consistent claims over many years that boys are underachieving (<http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/> Accessed 1st February, 2009). While reasons for these figures may merit some investigation, it cannot be denied that the results - and teacher perceptions - suggest that boys, certainly at primary age, do not always achieve their potential in literacy (UKLA/PNS, 2004).

For the *Boys and Writing* project, the local authority (LA) identified schools with significant gender performance gaps in writing. The schools participating in the project included two which had recently amalgamated; a large 3-18 school; schools with a number of children with English as an additional language and schools with large percentages of Traveller children. Most of the schools also served areas of considerable social and economic disadvantage. The uniting factor for these schools was a considerable gap between boys' and girls' attainment in writing.

### Structure of the project

The *Boys and Writing* project aimed to:

- support schools to improve the quality, repertoire and standard of boys' writing
- develop teachers' subject knowledge of multimodal texts

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- raise teacher confidence about selecting visual texts to engage boys and improve their writing
- improve teachers' planning of sequences of learning that will engage boys and lead to creative, high quality outcomes
- support schools to evaluate the impact of the project on the attainment of boys.

The writers involved in the project ranged from 4 to 11 years of age and incorporated three key stages: Foundation Stage, Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. Schools identified focus class groups at the beginning of the project according to their own criteria and priorities. Some of the teachers involved were very confident users of ICT; some were very confident teachers of literacy. Some were less confident. Others had challenging groups of children who, it was felt, would benefit from a multimodal approach to learning. All pupils in each class were involved and target children identified to monitor accelerated progress. Some schools chose to extend the project, initially into other classes then across the whole of the school.

The project was divided into 4 phases over the year:

## ***Phase 1***

Senior management and whole school preparation to ensure that the school's reflection on the challenges around raising the attainment of boys' writing was shared with all staff. (September - mid October)

- CPD to share project with whole staff
- Reflective audit for boys' writing in school.

## ***Phase 2***

Launch conference and school action planning (Mid October) ICT skills workshop

- Head Teacher, Literacy Subject Leader and ICT Subject Leader attending
- Developing teachers' subject knowledge of multimodal texts
- 'Tailoring' of project to maximise input
- Identifying key teachers for the project - began with skills workshop.

## ***Phase 3***

Development work within school with support from external consultant (November - June).

Support included:

- Leading a whole school INSET that re-ran the conference for all staff (one day)
- Planning a sequence of learning to engage boys based on a multimodal text (one day)
- Working alongside the Literacy Subject Leader or other member of the senior management team to develop a pupil interview schedule around boys' interests, to include the joint interviewing of a small group of boys. (Either half day or one day)
- Supporting the school to audit the boy friendly environment and resources and plan for their effective use to engage and improve boys' writing (half day or one day)
- Working alongside an identified member of staff to develop confidence in planning a unit of work with an ICT/multimodal outcome (one day).

Two informal meetings located in a school enabled leading teachers to come together, share good practice and reflect on the project so far.

## ***Phase 4***

Evaluation of the impact of the project on boys' writing (June/July)

- Sharing success celebration event
- Gathering data
- All schools meeting together. Children discussing their work.

## ***Funding (Curriculum Development)***

14 days of supply cover time was allocated to each school's budget. These included:

- Two days' supply costs for the Literacy and ICT Subject Leaders to attend the launch conference
- Two days' supply costs for two members of staff to attend the ICT skills event.

- Half day supply costs for sharing success celebration
- Two days' supply costs to work alongside external consultant.

The remaining funding was used to support in-school developments (as decided by each school). Schools were asked to give a brief overview of how this funding had been used as part of the evaluation of the project. Two multimodal texts were given to each school and a Talking Photo Album (see Glossary) was also given to each school.

### Celebrating success

At the end of the project a celebration event was organised for the participating schools. Groups of children, headteachers, teachers and governors were invited and stands were set up for work to be shared. This was a positive half-day where the children had the opportunity to present their work to a new audience and explain what they had enjoyed and how they had worked.

The event fuelled further inspiration for the next academic year as both practitioners and pupils took away ideas. Large screens enabled work to be shown and the room heaved with unit outcomes such as: Dracula boxes, talking myths and legends graphic texts, fantasy worlds in buckets, superhero characters and a table cloth size pirate map which had survived a class trip to the seaside! It soon became clear that the project had developed beyond single units of work as teachers had moved on to find further text stimuli.



*Top left: Graphic Narrative - a myth*

*Top right: Vampire Survival Kit*

*Far left: People who help us - Large talking photo album*

*Left: Year 1 boy's superhero character Mighty-Metal-Muscle-Man*

Evidence drawn from questionnaires and interviews indicated how important it was that time had been taken to consider starting points that would engage learners. Teachers commented on how momentum was maintained because children were aware in the early stages of the units that they would be creating their own texts similar to the multimodal stimulus. However, some unit examples showed how a multimodal text could be used successfully as a stimulus for a more conventional written outcome.

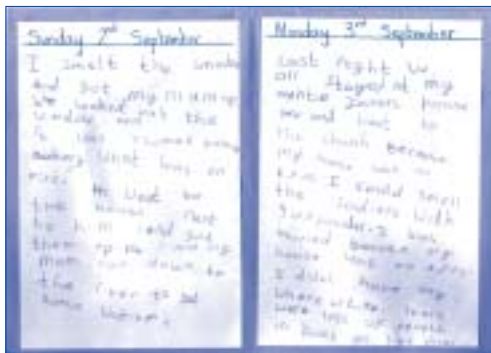
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Headteacher Sandra Bunnell from one of the schools with a high percentage of Traveller children, had previously presented her thoughts on the project at a national conference for headteachers. Her school had adopted a whole school approach and she shared the motivational work of the staff and pupils in her setting at the celebration event. It was also evident that the emphasis she placed on presenting children's work to an audience had led to stronger links with parents.

Sandra explained that visual stimulus had become a central part to learning and teaching at her school and many of the teachers and pupils now record short films for review and reflection in the classroom to generate creative language use. A Year 2 video was shown of an event to replicate (in miniature) The Great Fire of London. The children made model buildings to create a scene of London which was then set alight on the playground as the children stood back and observed just how devastating the fire was. This multimodal stimulus successfully supported the children in empathising with an event that was

clearly far removed from their lives today and developed into several diary entries.



A forum at the celebration event enabled all participating groups to contribute in summarising the multimodal work in schools. This was very positive and thought provoking. It was evident that collectively groups had moved from the very important stage of rethinking how we read texts such as picture books and film in the early stages of the project; this knowledge was now applied to analysing how image, print, sound, gesture and layout conventions contribute to the overall cohesion of texts that can be produced in the classroom.

## Project outcomes

The focus on visual modes had promoted sophisticated on-screen and paper-based reading and above all had been memorable. Activities had challenged learners and teachers to question how model texts are constructed, to pay attention to authorial intention and how modes may signal different messages to the reader. It was concluded that the children were more aware of the reader now during the crafting, revising and redrafting of their texts - stages that had previously been acknowledged to disengage boys.

It was concluded that a key factor to the success of the project was the element of choice that was promoted through the multimodal approach. The examples shared illustrated that the children were given the opportunity to make texts their own by bringing suggestions from wider experiences.

Teachers allowed themselves to be less restricted with time and units of work ran until all parties were happy with the quality of the outcomes produced (most were reported to run for 2-4 weeks). Many also explained that class timetabling had become more flexible so that ICT resources could be shared and stronger cross-curricular links had provided further enriching experiences.

*'Multimodality' has crept into everything! We use cameras all the time to record and support writing up experiments.*

Class teacher

Careful assessment of the pupils before and after the project enabled attainment and impact to be tracked. School data indicated that the writing of nearly all target boys across the schools had risen by at least two national sub levels in writing during the year. Girls' levels had also increased. There was no doubt of increased attainment in the quality of writing. However, for many of the teachers the success of the multimodal project was the boys' greater engagement, motivation and attitudes to writing shown in a more positive approach to reading, writing and talking about texts.

*This hasn't just been about boys, some of the girls were less familiar with ICT so this also addresses their skills.*

Class teacher

Teachers reported that many of the boys were:

- more focused in whole class and group discussions
- showing less delay in approaching tasks and being more eager to participate
- keen to amend and improve work
- motivated by presenting work to an audience

- using more adventurous language and adopting a meta-language to talk about texts
- responding well to activities which give them greater choice in creating texts
- supportive of peers in collaborative work
- quick to respond to challenges in ICT
- motivated by opportunities to record and respond in multiple modes of communication
- displaying inferential abilities.

The teachers themselves had experienced some changes in their own practice and reported:

- increased confidence in their use of ICT to engage and improve the quality of boys' (and girls') writing
- increased confidence in subject knowledge and in knowing what progress in writing looks like
- greater use of success criteria to support pupil progress.

*I know what to write now because  
I can see the pictures in my head!*  
10 year-old boy

Effects on the schools included:

- greater clarity about the identification of an under-performing group of pupils
- more clarity about the subject specific weaknesses of this group of pupils and greater use of ICT and multimodal texts more generally to address these weaknesses in a way that engages and motivates boys
- more detailed analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of boys' writing
- increased teacher subject knowledge in successful strategies that will improve boys' writing
- success in improving the attainment of all pupils measured by National Curriculum sub levels and Average Point Scores (APS).

In reviewing the project, the schools were keen to make further developments. Their plans included:

- whole school implementation of multimodal approaches
- monitoring and ensuring progression in children's multimodal skills
- adopting a multimodal approach across text types throughout the literacy curriculum
- maintaining links with other schools in the project
- continued auditing of texts and resource provision
- developing CPD and senior management support for colleagues to update skills
- extending opportunities for children to present text outcomes.

The project itself is planned to continue with an additional twenty schools to be involved in the following year. The LA has committed itself to continue consultant support for all schools and to create partnership schools where lead teachers identified from the original project will support the next phase of schools by hosting visits and sharing working examples. The LA are developing their virtual learning environment through its intranet; a portal for schools involved in the multimodal projects will enable teachers to post work, share ideas and resources. Interim meetings hosted at a participating school will continue to allow teachers to share work in progress and further celebration and evaluation events are planned to continue to review how the groups of schools have worked towards embedding a multimodal approach.

*There have been so many  
opportunities in this project for  
both teachers and pupils.*

Deputy Headteacher

See the CDROM for examples of interviews, questionnaires, data and school improvement materials.



## Section 2

### A multimodal approach to teaching and learning

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Following on from the influential research and school-based work of *More than Words 1* and *More than Words 2*, (QCA/UKLA, 2004, 2005) and *Visual Approaches to Teaching Writing*, (Bearne and Wolstencroft, 2007) the *Boys and Writing* project aimed to promote curiosity in understanding how texts carry meanings and can be used to foster an enthusiasm to compose. The teachers in the project felt that creating a multimodal text can be more complex than writing; the children in the project had become ‘composers’, ‘creators’ and ‘critical thinkers’ not to mention directors, illustrators, screen writers, actors, advisors, sound reviewers and producers in the literacy experiences.

Both paper and screen texts were initially examined to recognise variety in design and layout and to understand how representations convey meaning in different media. Activities involved reading sophisticated picture books with clever typographic text and picture interplay as well as digital technology which increasingly facilitates and illuminates the convergence of multiple modes. It was evident that in classrooms which encourage reading, discussing and making multimodal texts, children can apply the observed relationship between printed words, gesture and sound to their own constructions on paper and on screen. Programs and software such as digital cameras, PowerPoint™, Interactive Whiteboards (IWB), Talking Photo Albums, Talking Postcards, Photostory or iMovie were chosen for creating multimodal texts according to the effect intended. Choosing the best mode for communication became an additional factor alongside decisions on purpose, context and audience, for example, when allowing for vocal as well as visual expression.

#### Using these materials

A key aim in each Case Study is to ensure that the transference of skills from reading into writing will be clear, showing that the relationships between picture, word, sound and image have important implications for the way we interpret and construct our own texts. The planning sequences and examples in this booklet follow Bearne and Wolstencroft’s Multimodal Planning and Teaching Sequence:

***Familiarity with the Text Type*** - develop understanding of multimodal text

***Capture Ideas*** - note and develop initial ideas

***Plan*** - develop, record and structure initial ideas

***Draft*** - develop ideas from the plan into a structured text

***Revise*** - alter and improve the draft

***Proof read*** - check design and layout, spelling and punctuation

***Present*** - prepare and present a final copy to a reader/audience

(Bearne and Wolstencroft, 2007)

In this book we have called this process The Planning Sequence for Multimodality. Each Case Study gives some context of the school or setting and describes the teaching approaches used. There are success criteria for each activity and hints and tips on how to use any digital technology involved. There are also detailed planning notes which include:

- The Planning Sequence for Multimodality
- Learning Intentions using PNS Strands adapted by the teachers where appropriate for the specific task
- The Teaching and Learning Sequence.

Some of the Case Studies show how to make cross-curricular links, for example, with drama or ICT. These can promote inclusion and enriching experiences, particularly in the *capturing ideas* stage where the children’s own choices can establish ownership of the text and give direction in crafting subsequent *plans*.

It has been strongly argued that children today possess the digital mindsets and necessary cultural and cognitive tools to adopt and apply technological skills (Lankshear and Knobel, 2003; Marsh, 2003; Gee, 2004; Merchant, 2009). Consequently, the Case Studies link with new media to motivate learners particularly during the *drafting*, *revising* and *proof reading* stages. In addition there are examples of using editing tools to improve and critique texts with reference to earlier plans and previously explored models. Many of the published outcomes take the form of graphic narratives, graphic texts, films and digital texts.

To *present* a text to a reader or audience clearly provides a purpose and worth to the time spent composing. The Case Studies show that all the classes were aware that they were writing for an intended audience and there are examples of published work presented in school assembly, open gallery, viewing in a local cinema, daily onscreen broadcast in the school dinner hall, as books, live performance to parents, school websites and dialogue between schools.

Additional resources and examples of children's work can also be found on the CDROM.

The resources contained on the CDROM are provided in common formats for use in the classroom. The CDROM symbol indicates resources and examples. A large number of the files appear as Word documents or PDFs so they can be printed easily or, as in the case of the teaching and learning sequences, cut and pasted into other documents. Interactive whiteboard files are also provided in the two most common formats used in the classroom: Smart Notebook for use with Smart Boards and ActivPrimary Files for use with Promethean boards.



To enable children's work to be shared quickly and conveniently, examples from the project have been supplied. Examples of work are presented as: Word documents, PowerPoint™ presentations, individual jpeg images, wmv movie files and mp3 sound files. The video files can be opened using Windows Media Viewer or Windows Media Player commonly pre-loaded on PCs. The software is also available to download from the internet for PC and Mac computers. Any audio software can be used to open the mp3 sound files.

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